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(The) beadle

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THE BEADLE

By

PAULINE SMITH

Author of "The Little Karoo"

Sm637b

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PART I

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I

For close on forty miles, from west to east, between the Aangenaam hills and the Teniquota mountains, ran the straight grey road of the Aangenaam valley. The valley lay in the Platkops district of the Little Karoo, and north of the Aangenaam hills was the wide open plain of those low, flat-topped kopjes which gave the district its name. The plain itself was closed to the north by the Zwartkops range, which, like a jagged bar of steel, cut Platkops off from the Great Karoo. Midway between the Aangenaam hills and the Zwartkops mountains, and a journey of three days and three nights from the far end of the valley by ox-cart, lay Platkops dorp. Here Aangenaam men brought their produce for sale or barter, and here, in the days before Mijnheer van der Merwe built his white church for the valley at Harmonie, all such as could afford it had brought their wives and families once or twice a year for Sacrament.

The Aangenaam, though the longest, was the poorest of Platkops valleys, and "poor as an Aangenaam man" had long been a saying in the district. The farms, with their many acres of

desolate veld, their rocky mountain-slopes and their widely scattered lands, green only where water was to be found or where water could be led, lay far apart, and a man might ride for many hours seeing no sign of life between homestead and homestead. All through the valley—at Schoongesicht, Harmonie, La Gratitude, Vergelegen—much of the farming was done by poor men working hired lands for their own profit, or by bijwoners working lands on part shares for their masters. It was for these poor men, who from year's end to year's end could seldom make the journey to Platkops dorp for Sacrament, that Mijnheer van der Merwe had built his church.

Harmonie church stood close to a poplar grove on the left bank of the Aangenaam river, and a little beyond the church, on a slight rise, was the brown, mud-walled house where Aalst Vlokman, the beadle, lived with old Piet Steenkamp's daughters, Johanna and Jacoba, and their niece Andrina. The beadle—one of Mijnheer van der Merwe's bijwoners—was fifty-six years old and unmarried. He was a short, strong-willed, friendless man with small brown eyes and a small, reddish beard, and always in the evenings when his work was done he would sit, silent and alone, smoking his pipe on a low plank bench in front of the house. From this bench he could see all that part of the valley which made his world—

the lands which he worked for Mijnheer van der Merwe: the square white church where he served the Lord as beadle: the straight grey road along which the men and women of the Aangenaam valley came to Harmonie farm for Sacrament: the drift across the river and beyond it the little whitewashed store kept by Esther Shokolowsky, the Jew-woman: the poplar grove below Mevrouw van der Merwe's flower-garden where great red mountain rocks stood out among the flower-beds: and high above the garden the whitewashed, corbelled gables and dark thatched roof of the old Harmonie homestead, beautiful against the ever-changing pinks and purples and greys of the Teniquota mountains.

All this small world—the sights, the sounds, the very smell of it—Aalst Vlokman loved with a bitter, brooding intensity for which he had no words and which brought no comfort to his soul. He made a good beadle, taking great pride in his church and keeping strict order among the young people on Sacrament Sundays. But into all that he did there came a strange bitterness of spirit which drove men from him, and in the long Aangenaam valley there was no man who called him friend, no child who called him Oom.

The little brown-walled house in which the beadle lived with old Piet Steenkamp's daughters and which, it seemed to him, they were for ever

cleaning and tidying up, had three small rooms and an outside cook-house. With the house, which the sisters had rent-free from Mijnheer van der Merwe, in whose service their father had died, went a small orchard and a mealie-land down by the river. Johanna and Jacoba kept pigs and poultry, and goats on the mountain-side, and sold their produce to Mevrouw van der Merwe up at the homestead, or to the old Jew-woman at the little store across the river. They were quiet, hard-working, middle-aged women whom all the valley respected, but the beadle treated them always with deliberate contempt. In rare moments of anger Johanna, the elder, a silent righteous woman who, in her judgment of others, was as hard and final as her father, old Piet Steenkamp, had been, would raise her eyes and meet the beadle's contempt with a bitterness that equalled his own. But in Jacoba's gentle heart no bitterness could ever live, no sin remain unforgiven. Jacoba was never, like Johanna, roused to anger by the wickedness of others, but always gently amazed by their goodness. She was never conscious, as Johanna was, of right-doing, but often secretly troubled by a sense of her own sinfulness. She accepted life with the simplicity of a child and, like a child, bore it no grudge for the evils it had brought her. Only for her little Andrina

did Jacoba sometimes pray for a happiness greater than she herself had ever known.

Andrina du Toit, who had lived with her aunts from babyhood, was the only child of their youngest sister Klaartje, who had gone as a girl to her mother's cousin at the coffee-house in Platkops dorp and died there when Andrina was born. Of Andrina's father, who had disappeared up-country before his child was born, the sisters never spoke. When word had come to the valley that Klaartje was dead old Piet Steenkamp had borrowed an ox-cart and gone with his daughter Johanna to Platkops dorp to fetch the child. At that time Aalst Vlokman was transport-riding in the Kalahari desert with one of his master's sons. When Aalst came back to the valley old Piet Steenkamp was dead and Andrina was four years old. For his services up-country Aalst was made beadle of the square white church which Mijnheer van der Merwe had lately built, and bijwoner of the lands which for so many years old Piet Steenkamp had worked. And as if by right he had gone to live with the sisters in old Piet Steenkamp's brown-walled house and sleep on old Piet Steenkamp's low wooden bed. Thirteen years he had lived there and for thirteen years he had shown towards Andrina a harsh, suspicious intolerance that seemed almost a hatred. That the

child, through all these years of bitter brooding, had been dear to him none had ever guessed.

Andrina was now seventeen years old, and in the coming month of September was to join the church and for the first time take Sacrament. To the beadle the young girl was as beautiful as her mother had been. She had Klaartje's clear blue eyes, the colour of the winter sky, and Klaartje's fair, glossy hair, the colour of ripe yellow mealies. She had also, as Klaartje had had, that astonishing fairness of skin which is sometimes found among the South African Dutch, and when she spoke, or was spoken to, shyness brought a soft faint pink to her cheeks. Her features were as regular as were her aunt Johanna's, but softened and rounded by youth. Her body was slim and straight, and though many young girls in the Aangenaam valley were fully developed at fifteen, Andrina at seventeen was still shy of her little firm round breasts.

In her shyness, her gentleness, as in her beauty, the beadle saw nothing but danger for Klaartje's child. And in the weeks before the Sacrament, as he listened to her low answers in Mevrouw van der Merwe's Bible class, it seemed to him also that Andrina had no saving sense of sin. There was in her young innocent heart only that same large and dangerous charity which made her aunt Jacoba so tolerant towards sinners, so pitiful to-

wards saints. And who, thought the beadle bitterly, was Andrina that she should forgive sinners? Was it not for a sinner that Klaartje, gay and beautiful, had died alone in Platkops dorp?

Always in the Bible class the beadle was beset by these misgivings. And because they made his love for Klaartje's child a fear, not a faith, they drove him, in those early weeks of spring, to a greater harshness than ever in all his dealings with her. There came a day when Andrina's innocent, artless envy of those young girls who, more fortunate than herself, were to have new dresses for the coming Sacrament roused the beadle to a fury of apprehension, which found expression in bitter, and to the girl incomprehensible, references to Klaartje's life in Platkops dorp. Johanna and Jacoba alone understood him. Jacoba bowed her head in tears and shame, but Johanna, meeting the beadle's gaze with a fearless, righteous hatred, was moved not only to anger but to an act of tremendous consequence. Rising from the table where they sat at their midday meal she left the house and went down in her wrath to the Jew-woman's store.

II

THE Jew-woman's store, on the right bank of the river, was a small white-washed building with the single word "Winkel" printed in large crooked capitals over the half-door. It stood back from the road in an unenclosed yard which went down to the drift by which the river was crossed. The drift was a shallow one, and except in times of heavy rain could be crossed on foot by stepping-stones as Johanna, with such bitterness in her heart, crossed it on that bright spring day.

To Johanna Steenkamp, as to the rest of the valley, old Esther Shokolowsky, called simply, by reason of her faith, the Jew-woman, was a tragic and mysterious being who, to the end of her days remained a stranger among Aangenaam people. She was a small bent woman, withered and wrinkled by age, and in her faded grey eyes the only vital expression ever seen was one of terror. Terrible things had happened to her in her own country before she had fled from it with her grandson, and from the memory of her sufferings even in old age she had found no escape.

It was to Zandtbaai—a little port which lay halfway between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth —that their wanderings had first brought the old Jewess and her grandson in South Africa, and

from there, by way of Princestown, the young man had tramped one summer down the Aangenaam valley with a pack of patent medicines for men and beasts on his back. In the valley he had done good business and, coming again some months later in a dilapidated buggy drawn by two ancient mules, he had brought with him a little box of cheap jewellery, some rolls of coloured print, reels of cotton, tapes, buttons, gaily coloured handkerchiefs, as well as those patent medicines upon which his fortune was founded. With the buggy his business had steadily increased and finally, hiring a bit of ground from Mijnheer van der Merwe at Harmonie, he had built for himself and his grandmother the little "winkel" in which they now lived. Here they sold prints and calicoes, bags of coffee-beans, rice, sugar, salt, spades and buckets, cooking-pots, kettles, gridirons, combs and mouth-organs, sweets, snuff, and many patent medicines. Money was but little used in the valley and in payment for their goods the Jew-woman and her grandson took from the bijwoners and their wives such produce as they brought them from their lands—mealies, pumpkins, dried fruit, forage and tobacco, pigs and poultry. These in turn the young man took to Platkops dorp, exchanging them there, at the market or at the stores, for such goods as were needed to replenish his stock at Harmonie.

At the end of the previous month of July young Shokolowsky had bought part of the bankrupt stock of a Platkops store-keeper, and the little shop at Harmonie was now overflowing with such an assortment of goods as had never before been seen in the Aangenaam valley. With these the young man expected to do much trade at the coming Sacrament, but already their fame had spread abroad, and round about Harmonie the talk for some weeks had been of the coloured prints, the ribbons and laces, the cheap gay jewellery, and the little mirrors, rimmed with pink and white shells, to be seen at the Jew-woman's store. To this talk, repeated in wonder and delight by Jacoba and Andrina, Johanna had listened unmoved. Such things were not for her and hers. She and Jacoba, as suited their years and their station in life, always wore black calico gowns and sun-bonnets, and Andrina's Sacrament dress, made out of an old one of one of Mevrouw van der Merwe's daughters, lay ready, washed and ironed, in the little wagon-box in the bedroom which the girl shared with her aunts. With this dress Johanna had been content until that moment in which she met the beadle's gaze across the table at the midday meal. But in that moment, in the bitterness of her heart and in hatred of Aalst Vlokman, she had found herself crying to her God that

Klaartje's child should be dressed with the best in the valley.

When Johanna reached the shop, the Jew-woman alone was there, sitting bowed and patient on a high wooden stool close to the window behind the counter. Johanna wasted no words, beat about no bush. Greeting the old woman, she asked at once to see her prints, and when they were spread before her she fingered each in turn with a deliberation which the timid, humble Jewess felt to be majestic. To Esther Shokolowsky, who had suffered much at the hands of Christians, there was something great and awful about the bitter, righteous woman before her. In silence she spread out her goods before her and in silence Johanna made her choice. Johanna asked for buttons, for tape for binding, for cotton. She was served. There followed a long, unhurried reckoning—so much for eggs and poultry was already due to her, so much more in kind she now must pay before young Shokolowsky next went to Platkops dorp. When all was settled and noted Johanna left the shop with her purchase under her arm, and her heart as bitter as when she had entered it.

As Johanna reached the little brown-walled house, Jacoba ran out to her from the cook-house with a cup of strong black coffee. Aalst Vlokman had gone down to his lands, and Andrina

up to the homestead where, on certain days in the week, she helped Mevrouw van der Merwe in the kitchen, and Juffrouw de Neysen in the little post-office. The sisters were alone, yet there passed between them no word as to the happenings at the midday meal. If bitterness sealed Johanna's lips it was sorrow that sealed Jacoba's. Jacoba's eyes were red with tears shed for the beadle, for Johanna, for Klaartje, for little Andrina. And Klaartje alone was beyond the comfort of the strong black coffee with which she had run to each in turn. Sorrow drove Jacoba always thus to some definite act of service to others. Poverty limited her efforts to coffee-making.

In the living-room, flooded with the bright spring sunshine, Johanna, calm, majestic, having drunk her coffee, opened her parcel and spread out the print on the bare yellow table. The print had a pale grey ground closely sprinkled with pin-prick black dots over which were scattered small pink roses and little blue forget-me-nots. From the frequency of the little black dots Johanna drew a certain grim comfort for the daring of her purchase. Jacoba needed no comfort. The little pink roses, the little blue flowers for which she had no name, were an actual vivid joy to her, and Johanna's purchase of the print as a dress for Andrina was a miracle. Her heart, so lately filled with sorrow, overflowed now with a simple, child-

ish delight. She saw her darling at the Sacrament in this miracle of little roses and knew that not even the angels of the Lord would be more beautiful than Klaartje's Andrina.

"And who then is Aalst Vlokman," asked Johanna grimly as she took up her shears, "that he should say to us what Klaartje's child shall wear?"

III

It was in the kitchen that on this particular day Andrina's services were needed at the homestead. The kitchen was a big sunny room with a fire-place resembling a low raised platform taking up one entire side of it. At one end of this platform was the door of the great brick oven, built out into the yard. At the other was a small modern stove. The stove was seldom used and most of the cooking was done in three-legged pots and pans over an open fire in the centre of the platform. This fire was lighted always between two large stones set at some distance apart, and across which, to support a big black kettle, rested the flattened-out iron rims of two old wagon wheels. In a corner, close to the oven door, stood a long wooden oven-shovel.

The shovel, the chairs against the whitewashed walls, the meal-chest, the kneading trough, the

bucket-rack with its row of brass-bound wooden buckets, were all, like the ceiling of the room and its doors and window-frames, made of yellow-wood grown rich in colour with age and beautiful with the constant use of years. At one end of the room was a low brass stand, brought out from Holland by the first van der Merwe who, as a Landrost in the service of the Dutch East India Company, had settled at the Cape. On this stood a copper jam-pot, shaped like a huge fish-kettle, in which preserves were still made. Above the lidded jam-pot was a deep wooden rack bright with polished copper baking-pots and pans, also of the old Landrost's time and still in constant use. The scoured cleanliness of the tables and racks, the dazzling polish of copper and brass, the deep, rich colouring of the yellow-wood ceiling, the dark mist-smeared mud floor, and the high, wide, many-paned windows, made the kitchen at Harmonie one of the most beautiful rooms in the old gabled house.

From the kitchen an inner door led to a small passage, on the left of which was the dining-room, on the right a large pantry. The pantry had a single window (opening on to an inner court), and by this window the passage was lighted, for the partition-wall between pantry and passage was in fact but a trellis-work of polished yellow-wood running from floor to ceiling. In the trellis-

work was a door to which Mevrouw van der Merwe alone had a key, and this door was always kept locked. So, each with a little padlock of its own, was every canister of tea, coffee, sugar, rice, rusks, cakes and spices on the pantry shelves. The big yellow-wood chests of meal and dried fruits, these too were kept locked. One might have thought, peering through the trellis-work, that Harmonie was beset by thieves or inhabited by misers. It was neither. In the old days of slavery padlocks had been used and they remained in use. And though to get a cup of coffee one had to unlock the pantry door, unlock the coffee-canister, and unlock the sugar-canister, no human being, white or black, ever left the homestead without being offered food.

On baking days it was Andrina's duty to weigh out the stores in the pantry, and to help Mevrouw with her pies and pastries in the kitchen. At sixty Mevrouw was still a famous and active housewife. She was a big, gentle woman, capable and kind. All children and young people loved her and found comfort for the troubles of their age in her serenity and tenderness, in her low, clear voice, and in her smile which, in lighting up her own rather full and heavy face, seemed also to light up the hearts of those upon whom it fell. She was a deeply religious woman, yet all her religion lay for her in the fulfilling of a single

command—My little children, love one another. Beyond this she never ventured. If in her youth love had ever been for her a passionate adventure of the body or the soul, it was in all things now but a serene and gentle attitude of mind.

Of her eight children all now were married except Frikkie, her youngest son, who remained at the homestead working the lands with his father. But the house was seldom empty of little grandchildren for whom Andrina's services were as often needed as they were for the baking or the post. With little children Andrina was never shy, and though by certain standards in the district their poverty might bring Johanna and Jacoba Steenkamp close to the border-line of poor-whites, up at the homestead their niece was treated by all as one of the family. By Mevrouw's own wish she had, whenever possible, shared the lessons of the various groups of grandchildren who, on their longer visits to the farm, had been accompanied by governesses. In the schoolroom, in spite of her shyness, she had proved an eager pupil. But apart from the children shyness kept her always in the background and, except by Mevrouw herself, with whom she had taken the place of a daughter, she was seldom thought of until she was missed.

At the present time Mevrouw had with her as her only guest a six-year-old grandson, Jantje,

from the Caroline district, recovering from an illness. To this small, eager, excitable and delicate boy, whose home lay in the plain of the Great Karoo, no farm in all the world was so beautiful as this of Harmonie, and he was living now in daily anxiety for the arrival of his parents so that his infant sister Magdalena might share its glories with him. Coming down this afternoon with his grandfather from the mill in the mountains, the smell of baking brought him flying into the kitchen wild with excitement and hope. Andrina was taking a pie out of the oven on the long wooden shovel. The pie had round it a particular decoration of rose-leaves in pastry which his grandmother made only on great occasions. She could have made it to-day only for one person, thought Jantje.

"Ou-ma! Ou-ma!" he cried. "Is it then for Magdalena?"

"Magdalena?" repeated Mevrouw, smiling down upon the flushed eager face as she lifted up the pie. "Magdalena? No, no, my little one. For the Englishman from Princestown."

IV

HENRY NIND, the Englishman who, some months earlier, had come over the mountains to a hunt in the valley and stayed at Mijnheer van der Merwe's farm, had been sent out to relatives in Princestown for the benefit of his health. Princestown district lay to the south of the Teniquota mountains, and in the forest-lands between the mountains and the sea were the estates of those English families who, in the early days of the colony as a British possession, had made the Cape of Good Hope their half-way house to the East. Princestown was as English as Platkops was Dutch, and between the two districts, between the two townships, was a rivalry which no Platkops or Princestown man ever forgot. From this rivalry the Englishman, as a stranger to the country, had escaped, and in the valley he had been welcomed with a simple, almost Biblical hospitality which had delighted him. Touched and warmed by this the young man had made friends wherever he went. Wherever he went he had drunk the strong black coffee that was offered him and eaten the little red cakes and the rusks that went with it. He had taken pleasure in everything—in the kindness of the people, in the people themselves, in their houses, their lands, and the slow, simple ways

of their life. He had tried to speak their language and his gay, hopeless persistence in this had still further endeared him to them. To the men and women of the Aangenaam valley it seemed strange that a young man who rode so well and shot so straight should yet be so stupid about their language. But stupid and gay he was.

From his hunting expedition the young man had returned to his relatives in Princestown only to find, as time went on, that the climate there did not suit his chest. Princestown in the forest lands had one of the heaviest rainfalls in the colony, Platkops in the Little Karoo one of the lowest. He was ordered back to the pure dry air of the Little Karoo, and in a sudden whim had written to Mevrouw van der Merwe and begged her and Mijnheer to accept him as a pupil-farmer at Harmonie. Mevrouw had consented, and even as she set about her baking on that spring afternoon the young man, impetuous, selfish, craving for change, for amusement, for sympathy, was on his way down the valley in the weekly post-cart.

The Aangenaam valley post-cart ran once a week from Harmonie to Platkops dorp and returned three days later from Platkops dorp to Harmonie. Mijnheer van der Merwe's cousin, Tan' Linda de Neysen, acted as post-mistress.

She was a pleasant, noisy, kind-hearted woman with a slight limp and a withered hand, and her duties as post-mistress encouraged in her a certain love of gossip and scandal that was curiously free from malice. Tan' Linda had a finger in almost every pie in the Aangenaam valley and few grudged her the pleasure this activity brought her. She lived, and for many years had lived, at Harmonie as one of the family.

The post-cart could be joined at the toll-house on the Platkops-Princestown road near the foot of the pass over the Teniquota mountains, and it was here that at midday the Englishman had met it. It had a yellow body, red wheels, was drawn by two small sturdy Cape horses, and driven by an old Hottentot called Jafta. The pride of his office as post-cart driver lay for Jafta neither in his horses nor in his red-and-yellow cart, but in his bugle, which hung glittering in the sunshine over the end of the splashboard. On every possible occasion the old Hottentot, grinning with delight, would seize his bugle and warn all travellers on that straight grey and dusty road of the approach of his yellow body and red wheels. His bugle was to him a Voice in the Wilderness, and for several miles it was the only voice the Englishman heard. Twice they drew up on the roadside within sight of distant farms, and Jafta, having blown his bugle, climbed out

of the cart and hung a mail-bag on a solitary post standing upright in the veld. A mail-bag might hang thus by the roadside for several days before it was collected, but none in the valley had ever yet been tampered with.

They drove on, and before them, meeting in the distance only to part again as one drew near, rose the mountains to the south and the hills to the north in a vivid, softening, ever-changing glory of pinks and purples and greys. To the young man from the green forest-lands of the Princestown district this amazing wealth of colour, of light and shade, beautifying barren rocks on mountains and hills, was a miracle of which at that moment he felt he could never tire, though he knew it to be of daily occurrence against the rising and the setting sun. Closer at hand, in the lands of the far-lying farms, the corn was already up and the fresh young green of mealies was showing through the dark grey soil. The little orchards were pink with peach-blossom, and the veld too, grey and bare for so many months of each year, was gay with spring flowers. The freedom, the sense of space, the sharp, clear, invigorating air filled the young man with an exhilaration of spirit which was almost triumph. He would get well here. He would get strong. He would live his life as he pleased among these simple people and make of it what he would, re-

gardless of his relatives in Princestown. Suddenly, with the irritability of sickness still upon him, he exaggerated the boredom of life on his cousins' Princestown estate—the extraordinary narrowness of his cousin Emily bringing up her large family with a horsewhip: the solemn daily walks of the little girls with their English nurses, and the elder ones with their governess or parents: the visits in state to neighbouring families, of the same correct English standing: the aloofness from everything Dutch: the intolerable moral and social restraint by which they proved their damned superiority. . . . He was unjust, and knew it, and knowing it became yet more unjust and more than ever determined to insist upon his own freedom.

Half-way between the toll-house and Harmonie, by the side of a little stream bordered by willow-trees, Jafta outspanned. He led his horses to cool, watered them, fed them, and then built a fire for coffee-making. Mevrouw van der Merwe, he said, had insisted that he must give the Englishman coffee, and she had sent also, in a little tin which he now produced, some of the little red cakes which the Englishman loved.

Over their coffee the old man pointed out, far up on the mountain-side, near a shepherd's hut, an old stone-built trap for leopards. Leopards were seldom now found in the valley, but Jafta

spoke with enthusiasm of the leopards which in the old days of slavery had been hunted there. His father, he said, had been a slave at Harmonie, and the church-bell at Harmonie had once been the slave-bell. He imitated the church-bell. This, he said, was how it would go when he rang it for Aalst Vlokman, the beadle, at the coming Sacrament. Andrina du Toit, with whose aunts the beadle lived, was one of those who was going for the first time to take Sacrament.

To all his talk the Englishman, lying stretched out on the ground, basking in the sunshine, listened with a lazy content. Only when Andrina's name was mentioned did his interest quicken. Andrina. Yes, that was the name. Andrina. The girl who was sometimes at Harmonie like a daughter in the house and then when one looked for her was gone.

"Who is she, this Andrina?" he asked.

But Jafta did not answer. Nimble as a monkey he had leaped to his feet, run to his horses, and was already inspanning.

Half an hour before sundown, heralded by the bugle, the post-cart drove into the yard at Harmonie. Mevrouw was there to greet her guest, with Mijnheer and Frikkie, Tan' Linda de Neysen and little Jantje. The Englishman began at once to air that impossible language which he alone called Dutch. The yard was full of greet-

ings, of talk to which no one listened, of laughter high above which rose Tan' Linda's cheerful cackle. In the midst of it Aalst Vlokman came up from his lands to have speech with his master. As he crossed the yard Andrina came out of the kitchen to help as usual with the post-bags in the little office. The Englishman saw her, turned, held out his hand, and said in the one Dutch sentence in which he was completely successful:

"How goes it, Andrina?"

V

THAT evening Jacoba went, as always, up the mountain-side above Harmonie to drive down her goats to their kraal near the brown-walled house. Having found the goats, she drove them to the whitewashed graves of the first van der Merwes which lay a little to the west of the homestead. Here she sat down on a rock to wait for Andrina who soon now would be leaving the post-office.

Jacoba had come this evening straight up the mountain-side from the Jew-woman's store which she had visited as secretly as Johanna, earlier in the day, had done. From time to time as she waited for her little Andrina her hand went nervously to the bosom of her black calico gown,

but never did she have courage to withdraw what she hid there. She was not, except when despair or anxiety for others overcame her timidity, a courageous woman, and it seemed to her now that both her goats and the dead-and-gone van der Merwes in their whitewashed graves had their eyes fixed upon her bosom. And what was there, after all, in her bosom? She slipped her hand again into the opening of her bodice and felt the smooth curves of little shells, the slippery surface they surrounded.

From her seat on the rock by the graves Jacoba could see that corner of the yard in which stood the little post-office, the wagon-house and the stables. The post-cart had already been drawn into the wagon-house and the horses stabled for the night, but the post-office had not yet been closed and presently Jacoba saw a stranger, who seemed vaguely familiar, cross the yard and enter it. At the same moment the beadle came round from the back of the stables, and Jacoba saw him draw up close against the wall and stand there watching the post-office door. Suddenly, under the secret in her bosom, her heart filled with pity and the beadle alone held her thoughts.

A few moments later the stranger, Tan' Linda de Neysen, and Andrina came out of the post-office together. Andrina padlocked the door,

gave up the key to Tan' Linda, and came running out across the yard and up across the veld towards the graves where Tan' Coba would be waiting for her. Of Aalst Vlokman there was now no sign, but it was not until Andrina, slipping down on to the rock beside her and pressing her head against her shoulder, cried out in surprise: "But what is it then that you have in your breast, Tan' Coba?" that Jacoba remembered what she hid there.

"Look then, my little one," she said. "It is for you."

Andrina undid the buttons of the coarse black calico bodice and drew from Jacoba's brown, withered breast a little mirror, six inches square, rimmed with pink and white shells.

"Tan' Coba," she whispered. "Tan' Coba! Tan' Coba!"

Together, with beating hearts, they peered at themselves in the little square of glass through the fading light. For long they spoke no word. Never before had either of them possessed or handled a mirror. Never, in the little brown mud house, had a mirror hung for them upon a wall. All their lives they had dressed by faith. Yet now, with the mirror actually in her hands, Andrina asked for no explanation of this miraculous gift, and Jacoba offered none. The goats, the van der Merwes in their graves, the beadle—Ja-

coba had forgotten them all in watching her little Andrina's joy.

At last the silence was broken, and Jacoba, drawing the girl more closely towards her, asked:

"Who was he, then, that stranger in the yard?"

"The Englishman from Princestown," answered Andrina. And once again she drew her slender fingers round the little pink and white shells.

VI

It was part of Andrina's duty to help at the post-office on the day following the arrival of the mail, when letters might be called for from all parts of the valley and when the private bags of the larger farms to the east were made up. There was seldom much to do, for the community of the Aangenaam valley was not a letter-writing one. News travelled quickly, but not by post. The Dutchman, living almost as close to nature as the native himself, learnt his news from the spoors on the veld and the roadside, from the passing of carts and wagons, from the flight of birds, from the trembling of a bush, from the sudden cry of an animal in distress breaking the silence of the mountain-side. . . . By such means as these news was borne from farm to

farm as miraculously as seeds are borne by the wind and sown in a distant soil.

The post-office was a small square room which had once been a harness room, and round which harness still hung from wooden pegs fixed to the whitewashed walls. It had no window and all its light came from the half-door opening into the yard. In the middle of the room was a yellow-wood table on which stood pens, ink, paper, the Harmonie stamp and pad, wax for sealing the bags, a roll of string, a tattered book of postal regulations all cheerfully ignored by Tan' Linda, and a weighing machine, the weights of which had long been lost and replaced by a flat-iron, little bundles of pence and halfpence tied up with string, two smooth flat stones and a hammer-head. The weighing of packets and parcels was a complicated business which Tan' Linda had never dreamed of overcoming by the purchase of new weights. An old book-case divided into lettered pigeon-holes, a chair for Tan' Linda, a stool for Andrina, a seat by the door for visitors, an old map of South Africa, almost hidden by the harness on the wall, completed the furnishing of Harmonie post-office.

This was Tan' Linda's kingdom, and here the poorer men and women of the valley, many of whom could neither read nor write, and shy young men and girls in love, came to the post-mistress

for help with their correspondence. Her help was always good-natured, and frequently romantic. She who had never had any sort of love-affair of her own, and who belonged to a race in which marriage was, far more often than not, a matter of convenience or an arrangement between parents on behalf of their children, was constantly seeing, constantly planning, love-affairs for other people. For herself she had neither an old maid's regrets nor an old maid's bitterness. In spite of her infirmities she had found life, on the whole, an amusing adventure, and the fact that for her it was almost entirely adventure at second-hand had its own compensation in the vividness of her imagination. No love-letters in the valley, no letters of condolence, were as beautiful and touching as those written for others by this lively, noisy, kind-hearted and afflicted woman.

It was for help with a love-letter that Jan Beyers appealed to her when, on the day following the Englishman's arrival, he called at the post-office for his master's bag. Jan Beyers was one of the smaller bijwoners on Mijnheer van der Oosthuisen's farm of Blauwklips. He was a shy, awkward youth who found speech only less difficult than he found letter-writing. Yet on that day, finding Tan' Linda by chance alone (Mevrouw van der Merwe having called for Andrina),

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he suddenly opened his heart to her. It was time for him to marry. Long had his parents wished it. Would Juffrouw de Neysen write for him a letter to Betje Ferreira or to Toontje van Niekerk?

"Surely I will write for you, Jan Beyers," cried Tan' Linda, her eyes alight with interest, "but you yourself must first say for me if it is Betje Ferreira or Toontje van Niekerk that you would marry."

"Juffrouw, I cannot say," confessed the young man miserably. "See how it is with me! When I call by Toontje's house, then I think it is Betje. But so soon as I go by Betje's house, then I think it is Toontje."

"Jan Beyers," said Tan' Linda wisely, "for a man to marry one woman and think all his days of another is sorrow and madness. And you cannot now have two wives. Neither Betje Ferreira nor Toontje van Niekerk should you marry if that is how it is with you."

"But, Juffrouw, think now! If I marry Toontje, three sheep will she bring to my kraal, and if I marry Betje, there will be in our house the sewing-machine that came to her from the sister of her father's first wife that died of the dropsy in Platkops dorp. Is there another young girl in the valley that would bring me three sheep, or one that has a sewing-machine?"

"And would you then, Jan Beyers, marry three sheep to think all your days of a sewing-machine, or marry a sewing-machine to think all your days of three sheep? God forgive you, but if that is how it is with you, then surely if you would have peace it is a poor wife who has nothing to bring that you must choose. Wait now! Such a one we must find for you and her you must marry. . . ."

"But, Juffrouw," cried the young man in alarm, "think . . ."

"Be still now," commanded Tan' Linda, waving her withered hand. "Is there a man in the world that has such a tongue as you?"

The young man, abashed, subsided on to the seat by the door and gazed unhappily round the white walls. He was as incapable now as an infant of resisting Tan' Linda's good-natured interference in his matrimonial difficulties, yet his mind clung obstinately to the sewing-machine and the sheep.

Sitting by the table Tan' Linda went slowly through a list of the daughters of the poorer bijwoners in the valley,—Saartje Mostert, Lena Bosman, Klara de Wet, Doortje Pienaar. . . . None of these, for various reasons, pleased her. She was searching for a fifth when Andrina, with little Jantje, crossed the yard on her way down to the Jew-woman's store on an errand for Mev-

rouw. Tan' Linda's busy, romantic heart gave a leap. She had it! Here was the wife for Jan Beyers! Andrina du Toit. Andrina who had no parents to arrange a marriage for her. Andrina who was so shy that surely if one did not show her the way to a man she herself would never find it. . . . And the young man, Jan Beyers, sitting there in need of a wife, on the seat before her—where would Andrina find a more suitable husband? Was he not a member of the church? Was he not a man of good character? Was he not a good worker? True, he was poor, but not so poor that he would not soon forget both the sewing-machine and the sheep when he married Andrina, who had nothing in the world to bring him . . . When he married Andrina. . . . Already for Tan' Linda there was no "if." She drew paper and ink towards her, took up a pen, and began to write.

When Andrina returned from the store Jan Beyers had left the post-office. He had taken with him Tan' Linda's letter, which he was to think over and present to Andrina on the first suitable occasion. He had proved a little more obstinate about the sewing-machine and the sheep than Tan' Linda had expected, but Tan' Linda's busy and romantic heart was untroubled by the doubts which beset his own.

"There was here just now a young man that

spoke very kindly of you, Andrina," she said, with lively, somewhat arch good-nature when the girl entered the post-office.

Andrina blushed. And who was Tan' Linda the match-maker that she should guess where Andrina's thoughts went wandering?

VII

In the bright, clear spring days which followed his arrival, and in spite of the bustle of preparation for the coming Sacrament which occupied the entire household, the Englishman settled down quickly to the life at Harmonie. The young man was determined to prove to himself, to his relatives over the mountains, and to the world in general, that happiness lay for him in complete freedom of action, and with his craving for sympathy there went now a desire to please that was not entirely unconscious. To gain his freedom, to prove his happiness, he submitted with grace to ways of life which were only less narrow because they were simpler, and only more tolerable because they were strange, than those from which, in the Princestown district, he had so recently escaped.

Of the slow-moving thoughts of the Dutch, and of all that made the coming Sacrament so great a social and religious event in the lives of the

Aangenaam valley people, the young Englishman, with no feeling for, and no interest in, the history of any race but his own, understood but little. He accepted the hospitality of the men and women around him with the same careless grace with which he accepted every gift of heaven, but he never explored the sombre background of their minds. And in the Aangenaam valley, as in every other South African community, the Dutch retained their own direct Biblical interpretation of life. They were the descendants of a race formed by the mingling of the early Dutch settlers under the Dutch East India Company with those French Huguenots who, fleeing to the Netherlands after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, had been offered a refuge at the Cape of Good Hope under the rule of the Company. At the Cape, a few years after their arrival there, the French refugees had been forbidden the use of their own tongue, and only in the names of their descendants, and in the often beautiful names of their farms, do traces of it still linger. But though the Dutch Governors robbed the French Huguenots of their language, it was from the latter that, in the mingling of the two races, there came, through the memory of past sufferings and sacrifices, that intensity of religious feeling which still makes the Boers a race apart.

For these early settlers, as for many generations of their descendants, the literature of the world was limited to a single book, the Bible. In that strange new land of their adoption it was to the Bible that they turned for help, guidance and comfort in all the crises of a life which, in its simplicity and in the physical conditions of the country in which it was led, closely resembled that of the Patriarchs of the Old Testament. In their long treks through unexplored desert and veld, in search of water and green pasture for their flocks and herds: in the dangers which beset them from wild beasts and heathen savages: in the weeks, months, years perhaps, of isolation from any forms of civilisation but those which they carried with them in their wagons, they were sustained by the intensity and simplicity of their faith. Through the wide open spaces of the Karoo Jan van der Merwe from Holland, Pierre de Villiers from France, moved as through eternity, conscious always of the presence of their God. They were not now Jan van der Merwe of Holland, Pierre de Villiers of France. Together they were, like Israel of old, a people chosen of God for the redeeming of this portion of the earth.

When the colony fell into the hands of the English it was to preserve this Heaven-granted sense of nationality that many Dutchmen, in succeeding generations, trekked still further north into

unknown country with their wives and their families, their flocks and their herds, their Bibles and their guns. Nor among those who remained in what was now called "the old colony" was this sense of nationality, this belief in themselves as a chosen people, ever lost. Throughout the colony, under English rule, the Dutchman felt himself to be, in the sight of the Lord, the rightful owner of a country which he, and not the Englishman, had taken from the heathen. For the heathen he had something of the bitter contempt of the writers of the Old Testament. The freeing of the slaves by the English was for him, and remains for many of his descendants, an incomprehensible act of injustice towards himself and of indifference to the warnings of the prophets. And with each succeeding act of injustice towards himself the Dutchman has been driven to a deeper, fiercer belief in his race as a persecuted but chosen people whose pilgrimage is not yet over.

To this people the Quarterly Sacrament of their church, drawing men and women together from their far-lying farms and lands, remains the great religious and social event of their life. To their church in the township of the district, men, women and children journey by ox-cart, ox-wagon, donkey-wagon and Cape-cart for the spring or the summer, the autumn or winter Sac-

rament. From the outlying farms in the Platkops district this journey to Sacrament in Platkops dorp might take two or three days, and for the poor who had no means of their own of conveyance it was a journey that, to be made at all, depended upon the kindness of others. To bring the Sacrament within easier reach to such as these in the Aangenaam valley Stephan van der Merwe had built the church at Harmonie where the pastor from Platkops dorp now came several times a year to minister to his people.

Stephan Cornelius van der Merwe, the wealthiest and most highly respected of all Aangenaam valley farmers, was a tall, loosely-jointed man, slow in speech and in movement, just, generous, and patient. Both men and women stood a little in awe of him and he had a quiet nobility of carriage which made even little Jantje, whose joy in life it was to jump, step more gravely when he walked by Ou-pa's side. To his pupil, the Englishman, this tall, quiet man, who so seldom spoke yet spoke always with authority, seemed a somewhat lonely figure. But though he might live much of his life withdrawn from those around him Stephan van der Merwe was in fact never lonely. In his lands, in the veld, and on the mountain-side: in the cool, lofty rooms of the old gabled house where his wife, Alida de Villiers, still smiled upon his love: in the square white church

where men and women gathered together for the Sacrament, he was conscious always of the presence of his God. His God was not, as He was for his wife Alida, a God of love drawing His people towards Him like little children. He was Jehovah—the God of justice and of righteousness: the God to whom vengeance belongeth: the God who, showing mercy unto thousands of them that keep His commandments, would, in His own time, bring His chosen people into their full inheritance.

VIII

For the coming Sacrament only Jantje's parents, with their little Magdalena, were expected at the homestead, but for some days after the Englishman's arrival preparations for these guests, and for the pastor from Platkops dorp, kept Mevrouw busy in her kitchen with Andrina in constant attendance upon her there. And into the kitchen, like a gay, idle young son of the house, drifted the Englishman at all hours of the day.

To the Englishman Andrina's position in the Harmonie household still remained something of a mystery. For reasons which he could not perhaps have stated he questioned no one about her. He knew vaguely that Johanna and Jacoba Steen-

kamp were her aunts, and that the Steenkamps were among the poorest of the Dutch around Harmonie. But they were never mentioned without a respect that made them superior to their present worldly position, and at the homestead Andrina herself was treated always as one of the family. And by all alike, it seemed to him, her rare shy beauty was taken as much for granted as was her shy and silent willing service.

Wandering through the kitchen in his pleasant friendly idleness it was Mevrouw to whom the Englishman persistently addressed himself in the language he called Dutch, but it was Andrina whom he watched. Andrina's shyness did not, like the shyness of his cousins over the mountains, come from self-consciousness. It came rather from that selfless humility of spirit which was also her aunt Jacoba's, and it made her neither stiff nor awkward. In all her movements there was, for the Englishman, an unexpected ease and grace which he contrasted bitterly, unjustly with the correct, well-drilled bearing of his Princestown cousins. Hampered by their correctness, by their painful self-consciousness, the young man had found even the mildest flirtation heavy work with his cousin Emily's daughters. Whatever form it took he did not think he would find flirtation heavy work with Andrina.

There came a morning when, passing through

the passage-way from the dining-room to the kitchen, he saw the girl at work alone in the pantry behind the yellow-wood bars. The jingle of her keys, the bright steel locks of the canisters and bins, the lattice-work behind which, unconscious of his gaze, she moved so quietly about her work, made the pantry, to the Englishman, a strange, unreal, yet fascinating prison for her beauty. For a moment he watched her in silence, then, as to a prisoner, whispered through the bars:

"Andrina! Andrina! How goes it, Andrina?"

Andrina turned with a single cry: "Mijnheer!" She made no movement towards him, no other sound. But the note of fear which had raised the tone of her voice, the quick rise and fall of her little breasts under her plain, tight-fitting print bodice, her blush, the surprising hint of tears in her eyes, filled him with an exultation for which he had been quite unprepared. Yet at that moment he said no more. Slipping through the passage-way into the kitchen, he went out into the yard and made his way up on to the mountain-side.

Left alone in the pantry Andrina mastered her tears, which had been as surprising to herself as they were to the Englishman, but she could not, so quickly, master the agitation in her heart. In those last weeks before the Sacrament many

strange new emotions had swept through her heart, her mind, and her shy young body, and the new Andrina was constantly surprising, constantly alarming the old. As the beadle had suspected, Klaartje's child possessed but little of that saving sense of sin which filled him with remorse and drove her aunt Johanna into a bitter righteousness. Andrina's God was not, like theirs, a jealous God, visiting the sins of the fathers upon their defenceless children. Andrina's God was a serene and beneficent being who bore a perfectly natural resemblance to Mevrouw van der Merwe. Of Christ Andrina had never been able to form any definite picture or any definite opinion. His divinity meant nothing to her. Knowledge had come to her so slowly, and about the facts of life she had been so incurious that, until she joined the Bible class, the miraculous birth of the infant Jesus had been no more miraculous for her than the birth of any other child in the valley who might name only God for his Father. And the humanity of Christ had not yet been revealed to her by suffering. The young girl was, in fact, joining the church through no religious "experience" as the beadle and Johanna understood it, and with no religious convictions whatever. But because she was joining it her heart was filled with a vague gentle expectancy of some divine adventure outside her daily life. And into her

daily life, as she awaited this adventure, there had come again that gay and disturbing young Englishman of whom, since his first visit, she had never ceased to dream.

Of Andrina's interest in the Englishman no one but the beadle had ever guessed. Her shyness had been a natural protection for her secret, her humility had been her safeguard. On his first visit the young man had included her in the gay and careless friendship with which he had embraced not only all Harmonie, but all the valley. But though the sun had shone thus upon her Andrina had known that it had not been created for her. Who was she that the Englishman should dream of her as she dreamed of him? Her very daring in dreaming of him at all had at times appalled her. And at those times she had come as near to a sense of sin as she had ever yet been. But her "sin" lay for her simply in her presumption. In that alone did she find her shame. Her heart, so young, so pure, so tender, was conscious of no wickedness but this.

And now the young Englishman was at Harmonie again, making music for her of her very name . . . Andrina. Her name as he said it was like a song in her ears . . . Andrina . . . Andrina. His first greeting when he stepped out of the post-cart, his greeting now through the yellow-wood bars, was like a caress. But different

from the caresses of her aunt Jacoba, which were the only caresses she had ever known. On this cold, clear spring morning the Englishman's voice, which had brought tears to her eyes, had brought also a strange, new, exquisite fear to her heart. And though she might master her tears she could not master her fear. Nor did she guess that in her fear lay the prelude to that divine adventure which her soul awaited.

IX

WHILE up at the homestead Andrina was helping Mevrouw and the Englishman was watching Andrina, down in old Piet Steenkamp's house Johanna and Jacoba were busy too with their humbler preparations for the Sacrament. In their three small rooms everything that could be scrubbed was scrubbed, and everything that could be washed was washed. Day after day, it seemed to the beadle, the little house remained in upheaval, smelling strongly of soap-suds and whitewash and mist. Never had he known the Sacrament cleaning begin so early, take so long, or be so mismanaged. Through all his discomfort also he was conscious of a strange fluster in Jacoba and a strange grimness in Johanna. Groping for some explanation of their moods he could find it only in the fact

that Andrina was joining the church. But this explanation did not satisfy him. He swept it aside, and, searching for another, landed amazingly upon the Englishman from Princestown.

From the moment in which, out in his lands, the beadle traced the mysterious commotion and restraint of the sisters to the Englishman's arrival at Harmonie there began for him a greater torment than he had ever yet endured for Klaartje's Andrina. Though for many years now there had been between him and Johanna a double wall of bitter righteousness, and though between him and Jacoba there lay, like an accusation, her forgiveness, he had never before been conscious of these barriers except as a sign of his own power. Never before had he wished to destroy them. Never before had he wished to share with any other human being his self-imposed guardianship of Klaartje's child. And now that he wished to do both he knew himself powerless to do either.

On the day of the Englishman's arrival at Harmonie, chance alone had taken the beadle up to the homestead as the post-cart drove into the yard. But it was not chance that had kept him in the yard after the Englishman's greeting to Andrina. He had remained then of deliberate purpose to watch the girl's movements. He had continued to watch them through the bright spring days which had followed, feeding his mind

on vague and fantastic suspicions which drew him, more and more frequently, on morose and clumsily invented errands, from his lands to the homestead. With the same clumsy cunning he began now to make errands to the little brown-walled house, convinced that, sooner or later, he would find the Englishman there.

Of the beadle's suspicions the sisters knew nothing. To the Englishman they had, in fact, as yet given but little thought. Their minds were held by something which at that moment was of far greater importance to them than the entire race of Englishmen—Andrina's Sacrament dress. It was for the secret making of this that, when Andrina was up at the homestead and the beadle was down in his lands, they neglected their cleaning and took to their needles. And they were awkward with their needles. Here lay the cause of Jacoba's fluster, of Johanna's grimness. Sewing for both of them was a painful operation undertaken only when desperate necessity drove them to it. Their clothes as a rule came to them, like Andrina's, from the homestead. The black calico gowns and black calico sun-bonnets which they wore for Sacrament had been made for them many years before at the time of old Piet Steenkamp's death. And never yet had Andrina had a dress made entirely of new material.

It was Johanna who had cut out the dress, fol-

lowing as best she could the lines of the one given to Andrina by Mevrouw. To Jacoba Johanna's manipulation of the shears was so dangerous and daring a performance that it gave her a slight pain about the heart. Jacoba could no more have put shears to those little pink roses, those little blue flowers, than she could have put a dagger to Johanna's breast. If Johanna herself had any fears she stifled them. That grim and courageous woman put her trust in the Lord and cut. And to Jacoba's innocent and openly expressed surprise the various strips cut out by Johanna did, in fact, when tacked together, bear some resemblance to the other dress. Jacoba's opinion of her sister, always high, went higher still.

For the better guarding of their secret from both the beadle and Andrina, the sisters sewed in their small dark bedroom. At the first sound of Aalst Vlokman's heavy tread, or of Andrina's quick light run, the print was bundled into the larger of the two wagon-boxes which helped to furnish the room and Johanna fell grimly to work with duster and broom. Jacoba could never so quickly find occupation for her hands or peace for her mind. The most innocent of deceptions presented strange difficulties to that simple and single-minded woman, and her fluster would have been obvious to a far less embittered observer than was the beadle. And Jacoba had more on

her mind than Johanna had, for was it not she who had given Andrina the mirror?

The mirror, the existence of which had been acknowledged by Johanna in a single sharp ironic glance at Jacoba, hung in the bedroom on the wall behind the door. Here by no chance could it be seen from the living-room, and though this thought had not been spoken it had influenced Jacoba, and Johanna knew it, in the hanging of that little shell-rimmed square of glass behind the door. On Sacrament Sunday the beadle would, for the first time, and in church where protest was impossible, see Andrina's new dress. There was no reason at all, thought gentle, timid Jacoba, why he should ever see the mirror.

X

THERE came a day shortly before the arrival of the pastor, when Andrina was sent, with little Jantje, up to the mill in the mountains for a supply of the must-rusks made regularly for Mevrouw by the miller's wife. Andrina carried a small, square, gaily painted tin canister, called a "trommeltje," with padlock and key attached. In the trommeltje, in which the rusks were to be put, were little red cinnamon cakes for the miller's children.

The track from the homestead to the mill went

up beyond the whitewashed graves, across a bare stretch of veld, and then down into a dip between two kopjes in which lay a dark round pool. To the left of the pool, in a narrow valley of their own, lay the upper lands of Harmonie, green now with spring corn. The track ran along the side of these lands and then, growing suddenly steeper, made its way among boulders and stony slopes, sugar bushes and aloes, to the high, long, narrow plateau on which stood the mill and the miller's house. Both the mill and the squat, square, three-roomed, flat-roofed house were built of rough red boulders and stones, and behind them rose a cluster of great red rocks. Round the side of these rocks came the mill-stream, making its way with a pleasant clamour to its long wooden trough above the wheel. Down in the valley below, this same stream, on its way to the Aangenaam river, watered the upper lands of Harmonie and flowed through Mevrouw van der Merwe's garden.

To Jantje the mill in the mountains, set up so high on its narrow ledge, and growing, it seemed, out of the very rocks that so nearly enclosed it, was an enchanted castle, and the tall, gaunt, black-bearded miller closely related to an ogre. His delight in the mill, his secret, incurable fear of the miller, known only to Andrina, drew him up the mountain-side whenever he could attach him-

self to any member of the household whose business lay in that direction. Far beyond the miller's house, right in the deep silent heart of the mountain, was another stone-built house sometimes occupied by one of the shepherds. This second house, which he had never seen, was even more mysterious to Jantje's imagination than was the mill. Some day he meant to go there. But at present his intention was a secret shared only by Andrina, who was to go with him.

As they neared the mill Jantje, who had been chasing little conies over the rocks, drew close to Andrina's side and with difficulty refrained from taking her hand. Andrina looked down at him, smiled, and said in her low, comforting voice:

"Jantje is not afraid?"

"No, what," said Jantje, sticking out his chest and his stomach, and looking sternly ahead of him. "No, what!"

"For me, now," said Andrina, as if thinking aloud, "for me now I am not so sure. I would surely be glad if Jantje would hold me by the hand . . ."

Jantje shot a glance at Andrina's serious face and a hand into hers. "Have no fear, Andrina!" he cried, with a chest as prominent now as a pouter pigeon's. "Have no fear! I, Jantje van der Merwe, will take care of you."

For a moment he was silent, pondering over a

scrap of that strange grown-up talk to which Tan' Linda, in desperate need of a confidant, sometimes treated him. Then he remarked contentedly:

"And afterwards, when I am by my father's house with Magdalena, then surely, when they send you to the mill, he will come with you and he also will hold you by the hand."

Andrina, puzzled, looked down at the small, eager, upturned face. "What is it you say, Jantje?" she asked. "What is it you say? Who is it that will hold me by the hand when you are gone?"

"The man that Tan' Linda has chosen for you," answered Jantje and added, with a sharp cry of delight: "Look! look! A great, great-grandfather cony!"

"Jantje," said Andrina in a low, pained voice, holding him firmly by the hand and ignoring the grandfather cony: "Jantje! Tell me now, who is the man that Tan' Linda has chosen for me?"

"Such a man as will surely please your aunt Johanna," answered Jantje, quoting Tan' Linda. And he added inconsequently, after a backward glance at the grandfather cony: "The Englishman now, he does not please Aalst Vlokman, the beadle."

"How can you say that, Jantje," cried Andrina

with increasing and unreasonable pain. "How can you say it?"

"How can I say it? How can I say it? It's now easy for me to say it," boasted Jantje. "When Aalst Vlokman looks at the Englishman he looks at him so . . ." And he pulled a face of hatred and scorn for Andrina to see.

"But I," he went on cheerfully, unconscious of Andrina's distress, "I, now, I like the Englishman, and when I take you to the shepherd's house in the mountains I will take him also. Yes, truly. He also must come with us."

Andrina made no reply. Everything that Jantje said added, it seemed, to her unreasonable distress. She had no wish to hear more and no further desire even to learn the name of the young man whom Tan' Linda had chosen for her. Tan' Linda's young man had no existence for her. It was but right that he should remain nameless. But why should Aalst Vlokman hate the Englishman? And why should it give her such pain to hear, even from a child, that he did so?

Again and again as she climbed the last steep ascent to the miller's house did she ask herself these questions. They were still unanswered when she reached the yard and saw, in front of the mill door, the Englishman himself talking to the miller and his wife. Jantje saw only the ogre.

XI

THE Englishman had come, not by the track, but direct from the lands, with a message from Mijnheer to the miller which he had thought himself capable of delivering in Dutch. In spite of all his efforts, however, he had failed to charm the miller, a gloomy and unfriendly man, into any sort of comprehension of his master's wishes, and had turned in despair to his wife. The miller's wife was a small, dark woman, with large and sorrowful brown eyes. She loved her husband, ogre though he was to little Jantje, and ogre though he was fast becoming to his own children. But her love was inarticulate and sorrowful. The miller, who had been kind and stupid when he married her, was still stupid but no longer kind. Ill-health had set its seal upon him and he resented not only his ill-health but Mintje's failure, with all her care, to cure him of it. He did not believe himself to be dying, and knew himself to be, in fact, much less ill than Mintje often thought him. But he had come to trade upon his illness, making Mintje suffer because he must suffer, and driving his children from him in outbursts of temper which were as often as not maliciously assumed. In this same spirit he was trading now, to the Englishman's discomfiture, on his stupidity.

Mintje, in spite of her intense anxiety to help both the Englishman and her husband Andries, failed also to grasp Mijnheer's message. She gazed unhappily from one to the other and saw no way of helping either. The strange young man might stand there till midnight, smiling and talking and taking off his hat and running his fingers through his hair, but Andries, she knew, would never have more to say to him than "I know not." If it was a message from Mijnheer that the young man had brought, then she herself must at once go down to the lands to have it told to her.

She was turning with this intent when Andrina arrived with Jantje. "Andrina!" she called. "Andrina!"

At the sound of the girl's name the Englishman swung round and he too cried, in surprise and relief: "Andrina!"

"Mevrouw!" said Andrina. "Mijnheer!" For a second she halted, then, with Jantje's hand still in her own, crossed the yard and joined them. Her cheeks were flushed—with her climb, perhaps, but the Englishman did not think so. Behind the quietness of her manner, beneath that repose which, it seemed to the young man, her very movements so strangely suggested, was that same shy agitation of which he had first been aware when he greeted her through the lattice-

work of the larder. And again his own heart beat the faster for it.

"Andrina," said the miller's wife in Dutch, "speak now to the young man. Is it a message from Mijnheer that he has brought for Andries?"

"Mijnheer . . ." began Andrina, turning to him. She got no further. Eager, impetuous, convinced that perversity alone had kept the miller from understanding him, the young man once more repeated his message in the language which he called Dutch.

"Mijnheer," said Andrina hesitatingly, as he ceased. "Mijnheer . . ."

Again she was interrupted, and again the Englishman, gaily, eagerly, said his say. It was still Greek to Andrina.

"Mijnheer," she said, more firmly now, not wishing to wound him, yet seeing no way out of their difficulty for the miller and his wife but by addressing the young man in his own language: "Mijnheer! If Mijnheer will but say it in English, afterwards I will say it in Dutch."

"What!" cried the young man, amazed, "you speak English?"

Andrina blushed, and again, though she met his gaze with the candor of a child, there was a hint of tears in her eyes.

"Yes," she whispered. Then added quickly as

if in apology for her daring: "But only so bad as Mijnheer's Dutch."

The young man gave a shout. "Andrina," he said, "comparisons are odious, but you are adorable. With your English you shall teach me how to tell you in Dutch how adorable you are. Do you understand me, Andrina?"

"No, Mijnheer."

"Do you want to understand me?"

"If Mijnheer will give me the message for the miller," said Andrina, speaking low, "I will understand it."

"Ah yes, the miller," said the young man carelessly. "Well, tell the old buffer that Mijnheer van der Merwe wants the second sack of corn, from the lands by the little stream, ground for him to-day and he'll send a boy up for the meal to-morrow."

Andrina delivered the message, and the miller, whose only remark to the Englishman had been "I know not," now said contemptuously "I knew it," and disappeared into the mill. Mintje also, her mind at last at rest as to her master's wishes, took the trommeltje from Andrina's hand and ran to her little flat-roofed house to fill it. Jantje, released from the spell of the ogre, slipped from Andrina's side and made for the mill-stream, by the side of which stood Katrinka, the miller's

seven-year-old daughter. Andrina and the Englishman were alone.

"Who taught you English, Andrina?" asked the young man, smiling.

"Mijnheer," answered Andrina, "long ago I did know a little, but after Mijnheer was the first time here there came an English schoolmiss with Jantje's cousins from Caroline district. And every day she would speak with me and make me to read 'I go up, He is in' in a little green book with Jantje's cousins. Afterwards, in the post-office I did myself try to read in the post-office book and the Platkops paper."

The Englishman looked at her curiously. "What made the schoolmiss begin to teach you?" he asked.

Andrina, as incapable of deception as was her aunt Jacoba, answered in a low voice, as if confessing a crime:

"I did ask her, Mijnheer."

With a quickening pulse, and in a voice almost as low as her own, the young man said: "Why did you ask her? Had you ever wanted to learn English like that before I came?"

"No, Mijnheer."

"Did the schoolmiss ever teach you what 'adorable' means?"

"No, Mijnheer."

"Would you like to know what 'adorable'

means, Andrina? I could teach you that better than the schoolmiss. It's not in the post-office book or the Platkops paper. Shall I teach you, Andrina?"

Andrina did not answer. From the little stream came Jantje's high, childish voice crying to the ogre's daughter: "Look, look, Katrinka, how far I can jump!" From the squat stone house Mintje called to her children to come for the cinnamon cakes.

The young man, growing urgent, said gently, but with a new tone of command in his voice: "Look up and answer me before I go. I'm going now. Shall I teach you, Andrina?"

Andrina looked up. "If Mijnheer will be so kind as to teach me," she whispered . . .

And even as she said it he was gone.

XII

The Englishman went down the mountain-side with the pleasing sense of adventure well begun. On his return to Princes-town after his first visit to Harmonie he had thought little of Andrina, and only when Jafta mentioned her name at the outspan had her beauty come vividly to his memory. Yet now, dwelling upon the meeting at the mill, upon her agitation, her tears, and the artless confession of

her study of English, he persuaded himself that it was his interest in the girl which had brought him back to Harmonie. In this he deceived himself, and knew that he deceived himself. But he was determined now to carry on the deception. Was it not to prove his right to complete freedom of action that he had left his strait-laced Princestown cousins and come to the Aangenaam valley? Very well, then—in dalliance with Andrina he should prove it . . .

For Andrina who, a little later, went down the mountain track with Jantje, dalliance had no meaning, and love was not, as yet, a passionate adventure, but the slow awakening of her soul to a new undreamed-of glory that drew her close to God. She went back to the homestead with the must-rusks, then crossed the yard and went into the post-office. Here, sitting alone, waiting for Tan' Linda to join her, she drew from one of the pigeon-holes of the book-case an old and tattered English dictionary held together by a cover of stiff brown paper. She opened it at "A" and found her way laboriously to "Adorable—that ought to be adored."

" 'Adored, adored,' " she whispered, drawing her finger down the page in search of that word. She found it and spelled out slowly " 'greatly beloved.' " She read no further. In a sudden panic she closed the dictionary and put it hurriedly back

in the pigeon-hole. Her limbs trembled. Her heart beat so loud that it sounded like a drum in the valley for all men to hear. And to the beating of that drum the new Andrina came into her own.

That evening, as he came quietly round the corner of the house, Aalst Vlokman saw, through the little window of the sisters' bedroom, Andrina standing motionless behind the door. In her hand, held at the level of her shoulder, was a lighted candle. For some seconds she stood thus, immovable, and for those seconds the beadle, immovable too, watched her. But, from the angle at which he stood, he could not, thanks to Jacoba, discover what it was that Andrina gazed at.

PART II

I

THE first of the expected guests to arrive at Harmonie were Jantje's parents with the infant Magdalena, and from the moment of their coming it seemed to the Englishman that he was never again to see Andrina without the baby in her arms and Jantje by her side. As a matter of course, accepted without question by every member of the family, Magdalena had, within three minutes of her arrival, become Andrina's particular charge. Andrina was to sleep with the children at night in a room at the end of the house opening on to the stoep, and throughout the day she was to keep the excitable Jantje as quiet as possible playing with the baby. This arrangement was made without any discussion whatever, and almost, it seemed to the Englishman, without speech. Here, in the present state of things, was Andrina's place. And into her place Andrina slipped as naturally and as quietly as a mouse slips into its hole.

For Jantje life now became a delirious adventure in which he was for ever calling the attention of the world to his baby sister, or calling the attention of his baby sister to himself. And

he did this, whenever possible, by jumping from tables and chairs in a series of leaps and bounds terrifying to behold and meant to represent the agility of a spring-buck. Magdalena, a placid, healthy child, was perhaps the person least impressed, as she was certainly the person least alarmed and inconvenienced, by this amazing activity. His excitement brought on a slight attack of the fever to which he was subject and thereafter Andrina was given orders by Mevrouw to keep the children in the flower-garden. Here, said Mevrouw, there were at least no tables and chairs, and if Jantje must jump he must jump across the little stream that came from the mill.

The garden at Harmonie, called always Mevrouw's though Mevrouw herself was no gardener, was at this time of year a tangled wilderness of roses, wistaria, and plumbago in early bloom. This wilderness was surrounded by a high stone wall, with a gate opening on to the wide path in front of the house and a second, seldom used, leading to the lower lands near the river. In the stone wall little arches had been made for the entrance and exit of the mountain stream, and in the centre of the garden the stream made an island of a smooth, pointed, upright red rock. Round this red rock, this dear island, this enchanted castle, Jantje loved to sail his little twig boats. He loved just here, where the waters nar-

rowed before parting, and narrowed again after meeting, to jump across the stream. He loved just here to lie flat on his stomach and let the water slip through his thin fingers like a living thing—to catch it, toss it, and see it fall, in showers of diamonds, to lie glistening on the red rock. Throughout life the shadow of a great rock in a dry and thirsty land meant for Jantje the shadow of the rock in his grandmother's garden, and the River of Water of Life the little brown stream that flowed round it. Nothing on all the farm of Harmonie, in the lands, in the veld, or up on the mountain-side was so dear to him as this enchanted spot.

From the rock paths led to various corners of the garden, but there were no formal beds, and there was no attempt at order. Among the rose-bushes, lilies, petunias, verbenas, fuchsias and geraniums grew as they pleased, and with them grew those countless "slips" planted year after year by Tan' Linda with her long steel knife. Any more active form of gardening was impossible for Tan' Linda, but from every house she ever visited she returned to the Harmonie garden with cuttings which she thrust into the soil with her knife. That she never by any chance remembered the names of her cuttings only made them, when they flourished and flowered, so much the more wonderful to her. And, thanks to her

efforts, the garden became every year a little more of a wilderness full of strange and beautiful and unexpected things watered by the stream from the mill.

It was to please Tan' Linda that on his return from Princestown the Englishman had brought with him some bulbs from his cousin Emily's estate. Tan' Linda had at once conceived the romantic hope that the young man would add the flower-garden to his other interests as a pupil-farmer. She was soon undeceived. Though the window of his bedroom actually overlooked the garden, it was not until the arbour became the playroom of Jantje and his baby sister that the Englishman, on his way down to the lands, began to loiter in it.

The Englishman's bedroom, given up to him at his own request and under protest by Mevrouw, was an "outside-room" built against the high stone wall which surrounded the garden and having in that wall a small square window. It was quite detached from the homestead, and had been built originally for the Harmonie tutor. Its half-door opened on to the wide path which lay between the garden and the homestead, and a second window looked down a side path which ran along the south gable. On its flat, zinc roof yellow pumpkins were stored for winter use, and here too, in the fruit-drying season, figs were

dried on the branches of mimosa thorns. When rain fell its drumming on the roof made a strange, menacing music for little Jantje.

In this room the Englishman now had his bed, his bath, his guns, two rimpje chairs, a yellow-wood table littered with papers, pipes and tobacco jars, his saddle and bridle, and in a corner, as a concession to Mevrouw, a dressing-table draped surprisingly in white muslin trimmed with blue bows. And here, though still a member of the household, he felt himself free to develop other interests than those of a pupil-farmer under Mijnheer's guidance, or of an invalid in Mevrouw's care. As the former, he was, in fact, though he himself had not as yet realised it, taken seriously by no member of the little community. As the latter, he had the sympathy of all but Aalst Vlokman, the beadle. The Englishman was not nearly ill enough to please the beadle, whose fears and suspicions, now that Andrina remained day and night at the homestead, were driving him to a sort of madness. And when the Englishman began using the lower gate from the lands, and coming up through the garden to the homestead, the beadle decided to do so too.

II

CLOSE to the stream near Jantje's red rock was a small rose-covered arbour and to this Andrina took the children when she went down with them into the garden. Buckskins were spread on the ground for Magdalena to crawl on, and to the buckskins Jantje brought his toys—his flock of sheep, made of smooth white stones gathered on the mountain-side, and now herded for Magdalena in a little kraal made of twigs: his span of black oxen made of the shells of baby tortoises and harnessed to a small wooden wagon: his bamboo whip, with a long leather thong cut for him by Ou-pa: his catapult: his calabash dipper so that he might get water from the stream when Magdalena grew thirsty: and an old volume of *Chatterbox,* once the property of one of his aunts.

It was the smooth white sheep which pleased Magdalena most, and at whatever corner of the buckskin rug Jantje built his kraal, to that corner Magdalena would creep to get at his flock. She never wearied of this game and it ceased only when, without warning, sleep overtook her on her way across the rug. When she slept Jantje would open his *Chatterbox* and Andrina would spell out the simpler tales in English and translate them for him into Dutch.

They were so engaged when the Englishman went down one morning through the garden to the lands. As he reached the arbour Andrina hurriedly closed her book and thrust it out of sight. The Englishman smiled, stooped down, picked up the shabby green volume and said, as to a child:

"No, no, Andrina, that isn't fair. Didn't you say I might teach you? Come, let me hear you read."

And Andrina, with that quick, shy, unquestioning obedience to the wishes of others which was at once her danger and her charm, opened the book and read slowly:

"'Arry looked out of his window . . .'"

"Not Arry," corrected the Englishman, "Harry."

"Arry," said Andrina obediently.

"No, no! Harry. Have you no 'Harry' in Dutch?"

"Yes, Mijnheer. I say it. Arry."

"Spell it, Andrina."

"HARRY, the English. ARRY, the Dutch. Is it not the same?"

The Englishman shook his head. "I think not," he said. "But we'll pretend it is. Do you like the name Harry—Arry, Andrina?"

"Yes, Mijnheer."

"Why do you like it?"

Andrina did not answer.

"Tell me, Andrina. Why do you like it?"

So low that he could scarcely hear her, Andrina whispered: "Because it is the name of Mijnheer."

"Then call me by it," he urged. "Let me hear you say it."

"Arry," said Andrina gently.

The Englishman stooped down, murmured "You adorable child," smiled, and was gone.

For Andrina this second meeting, this repetition of the word "adorable," deepened her sense of that dear and secret intimacy which now filled her heart with such joy and such fear. There was nothing in what the Englishman had said, yet for her there was everything. Every word, every tone, was treasured. "Arry, Arry," she whispered, and tried again the harder English "Harry."

"What is it you say?" asked Jantje, whispering too with the quick sympathy of childhood. And he added, with as childish and quick a change of interest: "Look now! Here comes Aalst Vlokman, the beadle."

III

Aalst Vlokman, who for many years had not thought of using the lower gate from the lands, was coming heavily up the garden path. He had seen the Englishman stop at the arbour, and had watched him go down to the lands. He came up the garden now on no definite errand but to look at Andrina in passing. In the bitter brooding of his jealousy and love it seemed to him that he might read in a glance all that Klaartje's Andrina hid from the rest of the world. And if it was sin that she was hiding now, he who had not been able to save Klaartje from sin must save Andrina.

He came up to the arbour and halted with no word to utter. Andrina looked up at him and in the movement of her head, as in her eyes, her hair, the soft faint flush which tinted her cheeks, the beadle saw again the gay and beautiful Klaartje who, dying for a sinner in Platkops dorp, had herself died in sin. In Andrina's eyes was that same half-spiritual, half-sensuous joy which had once shone in Klaartje's. He saw it. He knew it. And in his tortured heart there was for a moment nothing but pity. But pity had so long been a stranger to his heart that she could find no lodgment there. Fear and suspicion swept

her aside and it was in a voice harsh with anger that he asked:

"And what does he say to you then, the Englishman?"

"Aalst Vlokman," cried Andrina in alarm, "are you ill?"

She had risen to her feet and was gazing at him in concern. His face was twisted as if in pain, and he leant heavily against the wooden post of the doorway. Andrina had no thought now of herself or of the Englishman. She saw only that the beadle was suffering, and that his suffering might be other than physical she never guessed.

"Are you ill, then, Aalst Vlokman?" she asked again. "Will you sit?" And when he did not answer she turned sharply to Jantje and said "Quick! Fetch for the beadle some water . . ."

Jantje, proud to be of service, picked up his little dipper and ran to the stream. The beadle watched him fill it and return, but saw nothing clearly, and his thoughts were now as vague and disturbed as his vision. When Andrina, taking the dipper from Jantje's hands, held it up to his lips, it was Klaartje who stood before him, in just that pose, in the coffee-house in Platkops dorp. It was Klaartje who said to him gently, as if coaxing a child:

"Drink then, Aalst Vlokman! Drink then."

Like a man in a dream he drank, pushed aside the dipper, and without another word left the arbour and returned to the lands.

IV

THOUGH she could not dismiss the beadle from her thoughts Andrina spoke to no one of Aalst Vlokman's visit to the garden and Jantje soon forgot it. The beadle had never held his imagination as the miller held it, and soon he had not only Magdalena and his parents to think of, but the pastor from Platkops dorp as well.

Niklaas Joosten, the pastor, a small, frail, white-haired man, had for his parish the whole of the Platkops district, forty miles from north to south, and close on a hundred from east to west. For many years the only church for all this part of the Little Karoo was the one in Platkops dorp, and Mijnheer van der Merwe had been the first of the pastor's people to build another. Between Mijnheer and the pastor there existed a friendship which meant much to both men, and the building of the church at Harmonie had strengthened the bond between them. Stephan van der Merwe was known to be a rich man, but through all his years of service the pastor had remained strangely unaffected by, almost indeed

unconscious of, the riches of others. His own needs were so simple and so few, his generosity so natural and so great, that but for the rather jealous, bitter care of his wife and the affectionate concern of his people he would have lived a life of absolute poverty without, in fact, realizing it.

For the pastor Mijnheer had sent a cart and his best pair of horses to Platkops dorp, and the old man arrived on the Monday before the Sacrament so that throughout the week he might himself conduct the classes for those who were to join the church. In the pastor's class, held twice daily in the church and watched over by the beadle, the young people were prepared for that final examination in Bible history and the catechism which takes place before the elders and at which the fitness of any candidate to become a church member may be questioned. So that the attendance of all the candidates at this last course of instruction might be regular all those who came from a distance were housed by friends or relatives living near the church, or by Mevrouw herself at Harmonie. It happened this year that Andrina was the only candidate whom Mevrouw had under her wing at the homestead.

In Andrina the pastor, who sought her out in the arbour, had long had a particular interest. Many years ago he had known her mother. Of

Klaartje's life in Platkops dorp he knew indeed even more than the beadle knew, but to no one in the Aangenaam valley had he ever betrayed this knowledge. Klaartje's gaiety, which old Piet Steenkamp and his daughter Johanna had found so hard to forgive, had come, perhaps, from some far-off French ancestor whose blood ran more freely in her veins than in the veins of the austere and righteous Johanna or in the veins of the gentle, timid Jacoba. Klaartje had been no Steenkamp either in looks or in character, and Johanna, a Steenkamp in both, had never understood her. This the pastor knew. And he knew also that throughout Klaartje's wild and rebellious youth Jacoba, with much to forgive, had never ceased to love her.

In Andrina it was now her mother whom the pastor saw, and now her aunt Jacoba. Andrina had all Klaartje's beauty, and though she lacked her gaiety she had something of that quick response, surrender, to emotion which had been so fatal to Klaartje. Yet the pastor had no fears for her as the beadle had. From some other source, shared with her aunt Jacoba, came that humility of spirit and that selfless devotion to the service of others which, in his eyes, outshone all her other qualities. Andrina was not for him the child of sin, but the child of God, and when he spoke with her in the arbour of the step she was

about to take in joining the church it was on the Fatherhood of God that he dwelt. Andrina had never known the love of an earthly father, but see, said the pastor, how God Himself had loved her! Had He not surrounded her with love? The love of her aunts, the love of Mevrouw, the love of little Jantje, and, greatest of all, the love of His only begotten Son who had died to save her. . . .

Andrina listened, and the world did indeed at that moment seem full of love—but it was her own love, for the Englishman, that filled it. She tried to shut the Englishman out of her thoughts as she listened to the pastor, but can one at will shut the sun out of the heavens? She tried to grasp the full meaning of the sacrifice made for her by the Son of God . . . but what was this sacrifice of which the pastor spoke with tears in his eyes? Did the Son of God not know Himself to be the Son of God? Did He not know that He would rise again and go to His Father? Out of all eternity where lay the sacrifice, in time, of a life on earth of thirty years? What sacrifice could there be for one who *knew* that death was to end in so triumphant a resurrection? She could not tell. She dared not, indeed, put her thoughts into actual words. If the sacrifice of the life and death of Christ upon earth were so wonderful and personal a sacrifice as the pastor

said, it must be some fault in herself that made it for her so meaningless. . . . If Christ had been but the son of Joseph, not of God, if He had died not to rise again, but to lie for ever in the grave, then, thought Andrina, she could have understood and loved Him. . . .

So her thoughts ran, and remained unspoken. Yet when the pastor asked her at last: "Are you happy, my child, and can you say truly that you are grateful to our Father for His many mercies?" it was with absolute sincerity, and with a heart overflowing with thankfulness for her dear and secret joy, that Andrina answered:

"Truly, Mijnheer."

V

For some days after the pastor's arrival Andrina saw but little of the Englishman. Her mornings were spent now not in the garden with Jantje and little Magdalena, but down in the church with the other candidates, attending the pastor's classes. In class she was the most serious and earnest of the pastor's students, but she was also the most diffident. And her shyness as well as her sense of responsibility towards Mevrouw kept her from joining the others in their laughter and talk after the classes were over. From the church she went straight back

to the homestead to take up her duties again. She was still Magdalena's nurse. She still slept with the children at night. She was still at the service of every member of the increasing household. And it was only at meals, separated by the whole length of the great table, that, for several days, she and the Englishman met.

Seated at that long, heavily-laden table, where everything served but the rice, the salt, the sugar and the coffee, had been grown on the farm, Andrina was sometimes conscious of the Englishman's gaze upon her. But he never directly addressed her, and she was glad that he did not. She was there not to talk to the Englishman, but to be of service to Mevrouw. This she must never forget, and she knew herself now to be in danger of forgetting it. With the discovery of this danger had come her first warning of the selfishness of love. After that warning she had tried, in self-reproach, to shut the Englishman out of her thoughts. To see him at meal-times, to thrill to his voice when he spoke to others—this was all that she had any right to. She knew it, and did not resent it. Yet in spite of her knowledge, in spite of her childlike wisdom, her heart cried out for more and she could not still its crying.

It was on the evening of the final examination before the elders that at last, for a few moments,

Andrina and the Englishman found themselves together and alone. Andrina, who had risen early from the supper-table to put Jantje to bed, was setting off in haste from the children's room to the church when, running down the gable path, she ran straight into the Englishman's arms. For a moment, standing in the pathway in front of his room, the young man held her close. He did not speak, but, tilting back her sun-bonnet, studied her features gravely in the moonlight. Andrina, with a little fluttering sigh, and no thought now of her selfishness or her duty to Mevrouw, lay quiet against his breast. The Englishman drew his hand lightly, gently across her brow, her cheek, her little rounded chin. Still he did not speak, but, in that dear and strange and reassuring silence, bent down and gravely kissed her. For a second her hand went up to his. Then swiftly, before he was aware even that she was free, she was out of his arms and flying through the night like some strange, white-hooded bird towards the church.

VI

The square white church at Harmonie, where the candidates assembled for their examination by the elders, was as bare within as it was without. Its walls were white-washed, and, without either loft or ceiling, ended where they met the yellow-wood beams and dark brown thatch of the roof itself. The floor, the seats and the pulpit were all of yellow-wood which had not yet grown rich in colour with age. To the left of the pulpit was the vestry door, and in front of it was the open space reserved for baptisms, confirmations and marriages.

For their final examination the candidates sat in two groups, the boys to the right and the girls to the left, facing the pastor and the elders, who had seats in a row immediately beneath the pulpit. The beadle's stool was close to the vestry door and by drawing it slightly forward he, too, though not in a line with the elders, could see both groups of candidates. But it was, as always, Klaartje's Andrina alone whom he watched.

For the beadle the examination before the elders of each succeeding generation of candidates was an ordeal which he, though none had the right to question him, had never attended without the foreboding of personal disgrace and calamity. At these times alone did he feel himself compelled to

answer the questioning of his own conscience, and his answers left him in no doubt as to the judgment of the elders. To-night, however, it was not of himself that he thought. His fears were all for Klaartje's Andrina. Convinced as he was that Klaartje's Andrina lacked the saving sense of sin, convinced of her moral danger, consumed as he was by his suspicion of the Englishman and his desire to expose him and so save Andrina from disaster, he yet found himself remembering grimly, with an ironic sense of gratitude to Heaven, that the elders were not likely to question her, as he had tried to question her, about the Englishman. He alone had guessed that secret. He alone must save her.

Of the beadle's fears for Klaartje's Andrina the pastor knew nothing. He himself had none. Her knowledge of the catechism and of Bible history was, he knew, sound enough to please the most exacting of elders. And of all the young people gathered before him that evening it was Andrina—so beautiful and so unconscious of her beauty, so shy and yet so eager, so open and yet so secretive of her new-found joy—who moved the pastor most. And was the pastor God that he might read all that lay in the heart of the young girl or know that her rapture came not from the fact that she was joining the church but from the memory of the Englishman's first kiss?

Seated at the end of the little group of girls, it seemed to Andrina that all the world must hear the song she sang in her heart as she felt again, here in the very House of God, the Englishman's lips upon hers and remembered his dear and unexpected gravity. And in her joy there was at this moment not the selfishness of love but that quickening of a tender compassion towards others by which some natures escape it. Timidly, as she rose to make her answers to the elders, she smiled not only to the pastor but to Aalst Vlokman, the beadle. The pastor answered her smile with one which seemed to her like a benediction upon her love. Aalst Vlokman gave no sign. A prey to his fears, his suspicions and his love, he buried his face in his hands and did not dare to raise it again until, her ordeal over, Andrina, accepted by the elders, returned to her seat.

VII

THROUGHOUT the following day, at the evening service of which all those young people who had passed the elders' test were to be publicly accepted as members of the church, men, women and children made their way, in slow-moving carts and wagons, along the straight grey road to Harmonie. In the church-land, and round about it in the open veld, they outspanned,

pitched their tents or spread their wagon-sails, and built their fires for coffee-making. All had brought with them provisions for their stay—coffee, biltong, dried rusks in little kidskin bags, husked and pounded mealies for pap, meal for griddle-cakes and salted goat-ribs to brander on the coals of their wood fires. Below each cart and wagon hung a three-legged pot, a big black kettle, a wooden cask for water, a folding stool strung with thongs of leather. Many brought with them also, on swinging bed-frames strung with leather, their feather beds and pillows, and their gay patchwork quilts.

In the Aangenaam valley, cut off from both Platkops dorp and Princestown village, men and women still retained many of the old customs which had already died out elsewhere. Here the older men still might be seen wearing kidskin trousers and soft, wide-brimmed felt hats, while the women, like Johanna and Jacoba Steenkamp, wore black calico gowns over many petticoats, and black calico sun-bonnets called kapjes. Veld-schoen were worn by all alike, and but for their veld-schoen the feet of many were bare. Among the younger people coloured prints were slowly coming into fashion for the women and girls, and cord trousers and cloth waistcoats for the men. With their coloured prints the women wore stiffly starched plain white sun-bonnets, like miniature

wagon-tents. The making and cording of these sun-bonnets, the starching and ironing, was a work of art needing long practice. Only the wives of the wealthier farmers, and only the most daring of these, wore hats.

In the gathering round the church rich and poor mingled together without distinction of class. Here, in the sight of God, all were equal. The square white church was the temple of His chosen people. Harmonie was their Jerusalem, the Sacrament their passover. None might feel this as intensely as Stephan van der Merwe felt it, but it lay behind the consciousness of all who had journeyed thither. And like the Jews of old the men and women of the Aangenaam valley combined the business of their simple lives with the service of their God and took this opportunity of bartering their early spring produce at the Jew-woman's store. Round about the church, at the store, up at the homestead, wherever one turned there was throughout that bright, clear spring day the deep low hum of life, the crunch of wheels, the cries of voorloopers to their oxen, the sharp clear voices of little children, the mingled smell of wood-fires, roasting coffee-beans, brandered goat-ribs, griddle-cakes, all making for Stephan van der Merwe and the pastor a song of jubilation and an incense to their God.

Among the younger bijwoners who had come

this spring to take the Sacrament and deal at the Jew-woman's store was Jan Beyers, with Tan' Linda's letter still in his pocket. The young man was still hankering after the sewing-machine and the sheep and unable to decide between them, and still fearful of, and rebellious against, the more romantic choice which Tan' Linda had made for the good of his soul. But the time had come now for his decision and he must make it. He could not, he knew, visit the post-office with Tan' Linda's letter still in his pocket. Betje Ferreira, Toontje van Niekerk, Andrina du Toit—to one of these he must, before the day was out, present it. True, it was addressed to his "beloved Andrina." But "Andrina" could easily be crossed out and "Toontje" or "Betje" inserted. Such things often happened to Tan' Linda's letters. And what, after all, did he know of Andrina du Toit? She was not nice and fat like Toontje. She was not loud and merry like Betje. One never heard of Andrina du Toit as one heard of other young girls in the valley. One never saw her except when one searched for her. And a man did not want a wife who hid from the world like a shy young child behind its mother's petticoats. A man wanted a wife with a proper sense of her own importance, a plump body, and goods to add to his. None of these things Andrina had, yet An-

drina was the wife that, God forgive her, Juffrouw de Neysen had chosen for him.

The young man, having, with all the slow, cautious, childlike cunning of so many of his race, finished his business at the Jew-woman's store, was making his way back to the church lands pondering on these things when Aalst Vlokman came down towards the drift from the poplar grove. In his preoccupation he had paused on the last of the stepping-stones to study once again Tan' Linda's letter, and it was a curt "If you please!" from the beadle that now roused him.

Jan Beyers, glancing up from his letter, did not move. Never before had he addressed the beadle or had any desire to do so. Like all young people in the Aangenaam valley, and like many older ones, he looked upon Aalst Vlokman as a man to be avoided. Yet now, with his matrimonial difficulties gathering fast to their climax, it was to the beadle himself that, from his stepping-stone in the drift, he made his astonishing appeal.

"Look now, Aalst Vlokman!" he said. "You that live in the same house with her, tell me now —is Andrina du Toit, who has nothing to bring him, such a young girl as a man would be wise to give up three sheep and a sewing-machine to marry?"

For a moment the beadle remained speechless. The young man's question did not astound him,

for nothing in life ever astounded him. But it opened up a way for him by which he might save Klaartje's Andrina from all that he feared for her, and his mind groped slowly along this way. That Jan Beyers, and his people for him, had long been considering matrimony he knew. He also knew, better than Tan' Linda knew, that in all his transactions the young man was swayed by his love of a bargain. After marriage he would settle down as men of the Aangenaam valley invariably settled down, to the life of a faithful husband and affectionate parent. But until he was so settled Jan Beyers would bargain for his wife as a man might bargain for cattle.

"And who then," asked the beadle slowly, "says that Andrina du Toit will have nothing to bring?"

"But, beadle, is she not an orphan? And are not her aunts Johanna and Jacoba Steenkamp?"

"And what then?" demanded the beadle.

"What then!" cried the young man, amazed. "What then? Now surely, beadle, even if Juffrouw de Neysen herself had not said it, all our valley must know that Johanna and Jacoba Steenkamp have nothing to give their niece when she marries!"

"And what if I, that live in the same house with them and know much that Juffrouw de Neysen does not, swear to you now, in the sight of the Lord, that on the day that she marries Andrina

du Toit will bring to her man two plough-oxen. . . . What then, Jan Beyers?"

"No what, beadle!" said the young man cautiously. "Show me first the two plough-oxen that Andrina will bring to her man!"

"Turn round on the stone that you stand on," cried the beadle. "Turn round on the stone that you stand on and look to the lands that old Piet Steenkamp worked for Mijnheer before me, and there you will see the two plough-oxen that Andrina will take to the man that she marries."

The young man turned round on his stone while Aalst Vlokman, his heart swept by hope, anxiety, triumph and fear, followed his gaze to the lands. There, in the brilliant sunshine, close to a thorn tree, stood his two plough-oxen. With these, as with a sacrifice to the Lord, he would save Klaartje's Andrina from sin. . . .

"Now well, now," said the young man, swinging round again on his stone, his mind at last made up and cleared of all regrets. "Now well, now! Move but a little, beadle, so that a man may pass. . . . Andrina shall now have her letter."

VIII

It was to the brown mud house that Jan Beyers went first in search of Andrina, and it was Jacoba whom he found there. He had come, he explained bashfully, for Jacoba's gentleness intimidated him far more than did the beadle's harshness or Tan' Linda's raillery, to present a letter to Andrina du Toit, and would Jacoba tell him where she might be found?

No young man had ever before come inquiring for Andrina, and Jacoba, standing in the doorway, felt again about her heart that slight pain which emotion always brought her. She steadied herself against the doorpost and, gazing at Jan Beyers, was conscious of nothing through her pain but an intense loneliness. It was to her at that moment as if Andrina had already left her and she herself were slipping through the sunlight of that bright spring morning into her grave.

The young man repeated his request and, vaguely, Jacoba heard him mention the beadle's name.

"Has Aalst Vlokman spoken to you, then, of Andrina?" she asked.

"Not only the beadle, but Juffrouw de Neysen also," answered Jan Beyers with a curious, childish pride which was already possessive. "If Juff-

rouw will but tell me where I can find her I will now take her my letter."

For Jacoba the grave had closed now above her. If both Juffrouw de Neysen and Aalst Vlokman had chosen Jan Beyers for Andrina she was already robbed of her darling. There was nothing but good to be said of such a match for Klaartje's Andrina, and she knew it. She could not stand in the way of Andrina's good, nor could Johanna. Johanna, she was sure, would welcome the young man.

"Andrina is up by the house," she said. "Go up now through the poplar bush and see first if she sits in the garden with little Jantje and his sister. She sits often there."

When Jan Beyers disappeared into the bush, the taller poplars of which showed a pale shimmering green against the clear blue sky, Jacoba went into the house and into the little bedroom. There she opened the wagon-chest which she shared with Johanna and took out Andrina's Sacrament dress. She spread it on the bed and smoothed out the creases, drawing her worn brown hand slowly over the little pink roses, the little blue flowers. She was crying, but did not know why she cried. Her pain had been followed by an intense weariness, and in this weariness the thought of losing the child whose love was now the only warmth life offered her, made her numb

and cold. Yet she wanted Andrina to be happy, and surely she would be happy with such a well-doing young man as Jan Beyers. . . . She would marry him. . . . She would bear him children. . . . And no evil would ever be whispered of her as once, long ago, it was whispered of Klaartje. . . . All this she felt was true, yet still in her weakness she cried.

She had dried her tears, but traces of them she knew still lingered and could not be hidden, when Johanna joined her. Johanna never cried, and because Johanna never cried, crying was an offence to Jacoba which filled her with shame. All her life Jacoba had tried, in vain, to live up to Johanna's standards. All her life she had been conscious of, and unconsciously oppressed by, Johanna's righteousness. Johanna had never understood her love for Klaartje and never understood her forgiveness of the wrong Klaartje had done her. Forgiveness for Johanna was a painful spiritual exercise in which she seldom indulged. With Jacoba is was a natural instinct. Jacoba could no more withhold forgiveness from the sinner than she could have withheld water from a thirsty child. Johanna seldom forgave an injury to herself and never forgave one to Jacoba. For Jacoba she had all the contempt of a strong nature for a weak one. But she had also, though she never gave it any recognizable form of expres-

sion, a love that was as deep as it was protective.

Coming into the bedroom now she ignored those traces of tears of which Jacoba was so painfully conscious and, going up to the bed, began with quick capable movements to fold up the gay print dress which Jacoba had so unreasonably spread out on the bed. At once Jacoba felt rebuked. Yet, had she but known it, Johanna's ruthless activity was not meant to rebuke her. It was by this clumsy means that the older woman sought to give the younger time to regain her composure. If she did not look at Jacoba, Jacoba would perhaps imagine that she had not seen her tears.

"Such a big gathering by the church as there is already," she said, putting the folded dress back into the wagon-chest. "As I came up now by the church-land old Tan' Betje Ferreira greeted me from the feather bed where she still lies helpless on her back. 'Look now, Johanna,' says she, 'I that never thought to come again to Harmonie for the Sacrament, I also am here!' Her son Hans it is that brought her in his master's wagon. And with Hans is his daughter young Betje whom men say that Jan Beyers will marry."

Painfully now Jacoba spoke. "Johanna," she said, "it is not Betje Ferreira that Jan Beyers will marry. It is Andrina."

Johanna turned sharply, and for the first time since entering the bedroom, stared straight at her

sister. Jacoba, mastering her emotion under that stern gaze, said weakly:

"He came by here just now with a letter for Andrina. . . ."

"What sort of a letter?" asked Johanna coldly.

"Johanna! Such a letter as a young man brings to the woman he would marry."

"But," said Johanna firmly, "it is Betje Ferreira that he would marry."

"It is Andrina," protested Jacoba. "He himself told me that both Juffrouw de Neysen and Aalst Vlokman had named Andrina to him. It was to Andrina that he took his letter, up at the house. . . ."

At the mention of the beadle's name a change came into Johanna's face. Her expression became at once alert and bitter.

"And who is Aalst Vlokman," she asked, "that he should go naming Andrina to young men in the valley? Is it for Aalst Vlokman to choose a husband for Andrina?"

"Johanna!" cried Jacoba weakly.

"Jacoba! Tell me now by what right Aalst Vlokman should choose a husband for Andrina. Tell me now!"

Jacoba made no answer. Her pain had returned more sharply now and sorrow again overwhelmed her—sorrow for Klaartje, for Aalst Vlokman, and, strangely, for Johanna. It was

with some vague idea of helping Johanna that she said at last timidly:

"But, sister, if Andrina herself should wish to marry the young man. . . ."

"Has ever she said it?" asked Johanna sharply.

"No, but . . ."

"Wait then, Jacoba, till she says it," said Johanna grimly. "Wait then till she says it."

IX

THROUGH the poplar-grove went Jan Beyers with his letter. The path he struck led down to the lands and brought him to the lower gate so lately used by the beadle. Jacoba had been right. Because this morning there was to be no special Bible-class for the confirmation candidates Andrina was once again in the garden with the children. She was coming down the path from the arbour with Magdalena in her arms when Jan Beyers reached the gate. Jantje was nowhere visible. He was, at this moment, a leopard among the rose-bushes waiting to spring out at little Magdalena as she passed.

At the sight of Andrina's slim young body, at the sight of that shy alarm with which, at his approach, she instinctively retreated, Jan Beyers suffered a sharp regret for Toontje's plumpness and for Betje's loud and welcoming laugh. But

this he knew was weakness, and the thought of the two plough-oxen steadied him. Over the gate, smiling foolishly, he waved Tan' Linda's letter.

"For you," he said. And added politely: "If you please."

Again Andrina retreated, questioning faintly: "For me?"

"Surely," said Jan Beyers.

Andrina did not move. In the valley a young girl received only one kind of letter—the kind composed with such ease by Tan' Linda, the kind that young men like Jan Beyers delivered themselves to those whom they wished to marry. Sometimes, in the post-office, listening to Tan' Linda as she wrote such letters for others, Andrina had longed to have one addressed to herself. But she had never dared to think of it as a possibility. Such things happened to other young girls. But such things, she felt, would never happen to her. They had never, so far as she knew, happened to Tan' Johanna or Tan' Jacoba. . . . And now this very thing was happening to her and all her desire for it was gone. The young man leaning over the gate, the letter he persisted in holding out to her, had no real existence for her. They were part of a dream dreamed ages ago and now only vaguely remembered. As part of this same vague dream she remembered also Jantje's talk going up to the mill. . . . This, then,

was the young man whom Tan' Linda had chosen for her. This was the young man who was to please her aunt Johanna. . . . But what else was it that Jantje had said that day? That the beadle did not like the Englishman.

As her thoughts reached the Englishman, Andrina felt again that quickening of her pulse to an almost unbearable ecstasy, and that dear new sense of security. The Englishman was no dream. There were moments indeed when it seemed as if he alone, in all the Aangenaam valley, were real. And what though the beadle did not like him? Had the Englishman need of the beadle's friendship? Did one need a lighted candle in a sunlit world? Like the sun itself was the love she had in her heart for the Englishman! Though no one else in all the world should love him, still, like the sun, would her love light all his world. . . . Of his love for her she dared not yet think. She possessed no measure for it. She knew only—and here in the garden path, with Jan Beyers waving his letter at her, her heart leapt at the memory of it—that the Englishman had kissed her. And she lived that he might kiss her again.

"Jan Beyers," she said timidly, "I cannot take your letter."

The young man lost his wide, foolish smile and gazed at her open-mouthed and speechless.

Andrina, pressing Magdalena's soft warm body

against her breast as if by this contact she might strengthen her resolve, said, more firmly now: "I will not take it."

"No, what!" protested the young man feebly. "No, what!" Like a puzzled, injured child he stared at Andrina over the gate. Never had he dreamed of such a refusal. Never had Toontje or Betje withdrawn from him as Andrina was withdrawing from him. Never in their presence had he felt as helpless as he now felt in Andrina's. Suddenly, as he gazed at her, he was aware of something about Andrina—her youth, her gentleness, her timidity—which stirred him uncomfortably. Never had Toontje or Betje brought him such unreasonable discomfort, yet, God knows how it was, neither Toontje nor Betje at that moment had any attraction for him. He desired only Andrina du Toit and her two plough-oxen.

"No, what, Andrina," he said, rousing to something like anger in his uneasiness, "you must take now your letter."

Over Magdalena's fat shoulder, as over a rampart, Andrina shook her head. Again, very slowly, she retreated. To Jan Beyers it was as if the two plough-oxen were retreating with her. In haste to hold them he drew his letter from its soiled envelope and cried:

"See how it goes—'My beloved Andrina' . . . Is there then any other young man in the valley

that has called you so, 'my beloved Andrina'?"

Andrina, stepping slowly backwards up the path, asked in a low voice:

"Was it you that called me that, Jan Beyers, or Juffrouw de Neysen for you?" and added quickly, in little more than whisper to Magdalena, "But even if it was you yourself that wrote it I will not take it."

"It was Juffrouw de Neysen that wrote it," admitted the young man gloomily. He turned the letter over in his hand, brooding deeply. Andrina, still retreating, neared the rose-bush behind which the leopard lay ready to spring.

"Look now, Andrina," said Jan Beyers, making a last appeal, "look now! When I saw you first in the path just now it was Toontje van Niekerk or Betje Ferreira that I wished to marry. But God knows how it is with me now, for surely if you had but one plough-ox and not two to take to the man that you marry, it is you that I would now choose!"

"Jan Beyers," cried Andrina, stopping short in her amazement, "I have neither two plough-oxen nor one!"

"No, what," protested the young man with sudden vigour, "now surely you lie! Aalst Vlokman himself it was that showed me your two plough-oxen in the lands that he works for Mijnheer!"

For the first time Andrina moved, not away

from Jan Beyers, but toward him. "Tell me," she begged in distress, "did the beadle say that the oxen in his lands would go to the man that married me?"

"Surely," cried Jan Beyers, for whom the oxen had advanced as Andrina advanced.

"And was it this that brought you to me with your letter, Jan Beyers?"

"Surely," cried the young man foolishly, holding it out to her again.

"Go then," said Andrina, retreating rapidly now. "Go then, for I that have no oxen will not take it!"

X

It was not, after all, Magdalena upon whom the leopard flung himself from the rose-bush, but his grandmother coming down the garden path in search of Andrina. Mevrouw recovering from the shock of this attack, stated that in the kitchen she had found herself in sudden and unexpected need of more eggs. Would Andrina go down to her aunt Johanna and beg from her every single egg that she could spare.

Andrina, giving up the placid baby, and leaving the leopard dancing delightedly round his new prey, ran swiftly out of the garden by the upper gate and went down to the little brown house.

Johanna that morning had taken most of her eggs to the Jew-woman's store, but some, she thought, might perhaps be found in the nests in the little orchard, or in the poplar-grove where the hens sometimes strayed to lay. She herself would go down to the poplar-grove if Andrina and Jacoba would go to the orchard. And to the orchard Andrina and Jacoba went.

Andrina had brought with her upon this errand a suggestion of haste to which both Johanna and Jacoba had at once succumbed. In the little peach orchard Jacoba ran now from nest to nest with something, indeed, of an agitated hen's fruitless activity. What eggs there were to find were found not by her but by Andrina. And her thoughts were as fruitless as was her search. Andrina's thoughts she could not guess. Had the young man delivered his letter? She could not tell. Was Andrina happy? Jacoba, watching her anxiously from under her black sun-bonnet, trembled for the answer she could not read. Suddenly, without intention, she called to her: "Andrintje! Andrintje!" . . . and Andrina was in her arms.

For a moment neither spoke.

Then Jacoba asked quickly, anxiously:

"Did he come to you with his letter, that young man, Jan Beyers?"

Against her shoulder Andrina nodded her head.

"Andrintje," said Jacoba, "he is a good young man, Jan Beyers."

There was no movement in reponse to this.

She said again, as if eager to do him justice, "A good bijwoner he is, and a good husband he will be."

Andrina stood still as a stone by her side. Her stillness, her silence alarmed Jacoba.

"Tell me, my little one, was it not a nice letter that he brought you," she whispered, and was answered:

"I did not take his letter."

At Andrina's answer Jacoba began to tremble. Andrina, conscious of her sudden agitation, cried sharply:

"Tan' Coba, Tan' Coba, though the beadle should give me three plough-oxen to marry Jan Beyers, I cannot do it!"

It was Jacoba now who grew still, and Andrina who waited. Painfully at last the older woman said:

"Tell me then, my little one . . . this about the beadle and his oxen . . . has he said that he will give you plough-oxen?"

"To Jan Beyers he said it. Two plough-oxen will he give to me if I marry Jan Beyers. Tan' Coba, Tan' Coba, why should the beadle give me his oxen to marry Jan Beyers?"

"No, my darling," said Jacoba, drawing the girl

more closely towards her, "that I cannot tell you." And under her breath she whispered: "God help him, the beadle!" Her sorrow at that moment was all for him. Johanna was right. Andrina should marry to please herself and not to please Aalst Vlokman, and there were other young men in the valley as good as Jan Beyers. . . . Yet Jacoba, whose trouble but an hour ago had been the thought of Andrina's marrying Jan Beyers, was troubled now because Andrina, in refusing Jan Beyers, was refusing also the beadle's plough-oxen. . . .

"Andrintje," she said, "are you then so sure that you could not love the young man?"

Very vigorously Andrina nodded her head.

"How can you be so sure? Is there another already that you love?"

Andrina did not speak. Suddenly, swiftly, she raised her head, kissed Tan' Coba's cheek, and buried her face against her shoulder. Jacoba was answered.

"Who is he, then, my little one?" she asked.

"I cannot name him," murmured Andrina, though in her heart she named him night and day.

Strangely now Jacoba asked her: "Is he one that will please the beadle? Tell me but this, my darling."

For an unhappy second Andrina held her breath, then cried, like a frightened, yet rebellious

child: "Tan' Coba! Tan' Coba! Must I then love to please the beadle?"

Again Jacoba was answered. And again, as if to protect her, she drew the girl more closely towards her. Love, what was love? To her, to Aalst Vlokman, to Klaartje, what had it brought but sadness?

"Andrintje," she whispered, "Andrintje . . ." but found no words with which to frame her warning. A moment longer she held her close, then, releasing her, said quickly: "See, my little one!—Here comes Tan' Johanna from the poplar-grove."

XI

ANDRINA went back to the homestead with her eggs, but she did not return to the garden. It was in the kitchen that Mevrouw now needed her help and she was kept busy there until the midday meal was served. For this meal many extra guests came up from the church-lands and it was at the head of a crowded table in the dining-room that Mijnheer took his seat and the pastor asked the blessing.

The dining-room at Harmonie, occupying the whole width of the house, was a passage room of many doors and two high, many-paned windows, framed and shuttered in dark, polished stink-

wood. One of these windows looked out on to the stoep and garden, the other across the yard to Tan' Linda's post-office. The room was so well-proportioned that, as the living-room of the family, its use as a passage-way had never been found inconvenient. If it was a thoroughfare it was a thoroughfare in which there was always space—and peace—in which to linger. It was also the only room in the house, apart from the kitchen, which possessed a fire-place. This fire-place had folding stink-wood doors which, when closed, resembled those of a great wall-cupboard. On the coldest of winter evenings the fire-place was opened and a fire built on the wide stone hearth on each side of which stood a tall, vase-like, brass spittoon.

All the furniture in this spacious room—the chairs strung with thongs of leather, the great brass-bound chests, the tall corner cupboard—was, like the doors, the window-frames and the fire-place, of dark, polished stink-wood or teak, and most of it had been made in the time of Stephan van der Merwe's great-grandparents by slaves trained to copy the work of European or Batavian masters. Against this dark setting, achieved so many years ago for the van der Merwe family by the labour of slaves, there now shone the soft, shy, fair beauty of old Piet Steenkamp's granddaughter, Andrina du Toit. And

never, thought the Englishman, had Andrina looked more beautiful than she did this morning as, flushed and eager, shy and sensitive, her eyes never daring to meet his own, she waited upon Mevrouw van der Merwe's guests.

Under the influence of the pastor and Mijnheer the talk round the table was at first mainly about church matters. The pastor spoke of the mother-church in Platkops dorp, of his work among his people there, of the blessing that comes to all alike, rich and poor, humble and gentle, in town or in country, through the Sacraments ordained by a Heavenly Father for the salvation and comfort of His sinful children. And in that lofty, spacious room there was no man, no woman, no child who was not in some way the better for his simple discourse. He spoke in Dutch, but now and then turned to the Englishman and addressed him in slow, careful Biblical English. To the Englishman, as a stranger in their midst, courtesy was shown by all, and as the talk became more general it was now the pastor, and now Tan' Linda, who acted as interpreter for him. Stephan van der Merwe's English was limited to but a few words and phrases. Mevrouw had little more. She was one of those rare beings whose wise and natural kindness of heart, whose sympathy and understanding, overcome the barriers of speech.

The talk drifted to those who had already ar-

rived for the coming Sacrament and camped out in the church-land. Old Tan' Betje Ferreira was mentioned. Many, many months, the pastor explained to the Englishman, had Tan' Betje lain helpless on her bed, and now, in answer to prayer, her pain had been so much eased that it had been possible for her son Hans to bring her to Harmonie for the Sacrament on a swinging bed-frame in a borrowed wagon. Hans was a good son and in young Betje he had a good daughter as old Betje had a good grandchild. Poor they were, as so many Aangenaam people were, but rich in their affection for one another. Young Betje would make a good wife, and he, the pastor, hoped there was truth in the report that Jan Beyers wished to marry her. Jan Beyers was an upright and well-doing young man, and Betje, for her kindness to her grandmother, deserved a good husband.

"But others also deserve good husbands," cried Tan' Linda, smiling archly across the table to Andrina. "Others also!"

Andrina blushed and dared not raise her head. Mevrouw, unable to follow these remarks in English, had yet guessed their import from the mention of Jan Beyers's name, from Tan' Linda's archness, and from Andrina's discomfiture. She drew Andrina's hand into hers and smiling upon the pastor, upon the Englishman, and upon that

incurable matchmaker Tan' Linda, said gently, but firmly: "To no one yet can I spare my little Andrintje."

The talk passed on to other matters and slowly Andrina regained her composure. Now and then she heard the Englishman's voice—that sweet music to her ears—and now and then she felt, for an instant, his gaze upon her. But only once did he look at her directly or directly address her. The meal was almost over and Andrina was serving the large cups of strong, black, bitter coffee with which it was ending. As the Englishman took his cup, he smiled at her gravely and said, so that she alone might hear:

"And I too can spare my little Andrina to no one else!"

XII

THE Englishman's remark, made only for Andrina to hear, had not been too low to be caught by Tan' Linda's sharp and romance-loving ears. Here was something, under her very nose, that she, matchmaker to the entire valley, had never dreamed of! Andrina and the Englishman! Her heart leapt with excitement, and with that ungrudging delight in the love-fortune of others of which no self-pity, no old-maidish regrets had ever robbed her. Andrina and

the Englishman! Here was a secret which surely only she had guessed! And so tremendous a secret that it needed much self-control on her part not to shout it aloud in triumph. It was indeed the kind of secret that most appealed to her—the kind that one hugged to one's heart as a treasure, knowing all the while that at any moment it might slip from one's keeping to explode like a bomb-shell upon an astounded world. . . . Andrina and the Englishman! A pity it was, she thought, that the young man was not stronger. Still, he was stronger perhaps than he imagined. And Andrina knew a little English and could nurse him in English. They would marry in the church here, and afterwards the Englishman would take her over the mountains to Princestown. The Englishman's relatives there might perhaps not be pleased at first, for she had heard that they were proud. But of what could they be so proud? Had not every Dutch family in the colony been settled at the Cape long before the English came there? Surely this was so, and she herself, Tan' Linda, would explain to them that, although the Steenkamps were now so poor, they were the descendants of a schoolmaster who had come out to the colony in the early eighteenth century. Quite probably the first Steenkamp had preached as well as taught. Almost certainly he had. So that perhaps one might be justified in calling him

a pastor. And what fault could be found with the descendants of a pastor? However poor they might be they were still the descendants of a pastor and so, of course, of good family. Yes, certainly Andrina was of good family. One had but to look at her to see it, so quiet was she in her ways, so gentle in her speech. As for Jan Beyers—the sooner that young man married Betje Ferreira the better. And she must see about it. He had not yet, so far as she knew, had an opportunity of delivering his letter to Andrina. And he must have none.

Tan' Linda's thoughts carried her out gaily to the post-office and might have carried her further had they not been met here by Jan Beyers himself. The young man was standing awkwardly by the padlocked door and gave her a sheepish greeting as she crossed the yard.

"It was you that I was thinking of, Jan Beyers," she said, fitting the key to the padlock. "Come in, now!"

Together they entered the little office, and Tan' Linda, sitting down at her table, motioned the young man to the seat by the door.

"Jan Beyers," she said, plunging at once, with cheerful decision, into the young man's affairs: "Look now! It was a mistake that I made when I gave you the name of Andrina du Toit for your wife. It is Betje Ferreira that you must marry.

Give me your letter and I will now change the name from Andrina to Betje."

"No, what, Juffrouw," said the young man miserably, producing his letter but not giving it up, "Andrina's and not Betje's is the name that I will keep for my letter. That is how it is with me now!"

"Jan Beyers," cried Tan' Linda in alarm, "what mean you?"

"No, what, Juffrouw! Did not you yourself first choose Andrina for me? Why now must I marry Betje?"

"Jan Beyers, when first I chose Andrina for you you would not hear her name! Why now will you hear no other?"

"No, what," confided the young man in his misery. "See how it is! So soon as Andrina said that she would not take my letter, then I knew it was she and not Betje Ferreira or Toontje van Niekerk that I wished to marry. And three whole hours has it been so with me now. It was for this that I came to you. To ask you to speak with Andrina for me."

"Now look, now, Jan Beyers," said Tan' Linda firmly, "if Andrina has said that she will not have your letter it is now finished! Can a man take a wife against her will?"

"No, what," persisted the young man obsti-

nately, "but surely if you and the beadle speak for me Andrina will take my letter!"

"The beadle!" cried Tan' Linda in amazement. "The beadle? And what then has the beadle to do with Andrina's letter?"

The young man grew hot and uncomfortable. He had not meant to mention the beadle. He had not meant to mention the two plough-oxen. Now, having mentioned the former, he knew himself doomed to mention the latter. Miserably his gaze travelled round that little room and rested at last on the flat-iron which did duty as a weight on Tan' Linda's scales.

"I met now the beadle in the river bed this morning, and he spoke with me about Andrina du Toit," he said at last.

"And what did he say, Jan Beyers?"

"No, what, Juffrouw," said the young man unhappily, plunging to his doom, "he said that to the man that married Andrina there would go the two plough-oxen from his lands."

For one amazed and delirious moment Tan' Linda allowed herself to picture the beadle presenting his two plough-oxen to the Englishman. But only for a moment. God might know what lay behind the beadle and his oxen, but she certainly did not, and had no time at present to explore this mystery. It was Jan Beyers whom she

had now to settle, and settled the young man should be.

"Tell me, now," she cried, wagging an accusing finger at him, "tell me, now! Is it Andrina or the two plough-oxen that have run three hours through your mind?"

"No, what, Juffrouw," protested the young man foolishly, "no, what!"

"You see how it is, Jan Beyers! The beadle has but to say oxen to you and you run where oxen may be found. So you will run after cattle all the days of your life, crying out for a wife, if you do not now settle your mind by marrying one that has none. Well you know, Jan Beyers, that this is your weakness and that all men laugh at it. Take now Betje Ferreira, that has but a sewing-machine to bring to you, and all men will speak well of you. Believe me, Jan Beyers, if you do this, when you come at night to your house where Betje sits working the sewing-machine, the noise that she makes will be like music in your ears and you will think no more of Toontje and her sheep or Andrina and her oxen."

Very slowly the young man drew his letter out of its envelope. He felt vaguely that somewhere Tan' Linda's reasoning was at fault, but he knew well that he was incapable of discovering this fault, and that even if he could discover it and face her with it, she would refuse to be abashed

into silence. There was no hope for him now but in marriage. Life for him, as a bachelor, seemed now but a series of complications in which the ways of women were rapidly becoming as incomprehensible to him as had always been the ways of God. With neither God nor women, so far as he could see, could one ever be sure of driving a good bargain. The ways of God, he knew, would never be made clear to him. Marriage might perhaps bring some explanation of the ways of women. . . . He held out his letter.

"No, what, Juffrouw," he said. "Change now the name and I will take it to Betje."

XIII

THOUGH the Englishman's remark had sent Tan' Linda so gaily to the work of building castles for others in Spain, Andrina herself gave no thought to anything but the actual present. In her life of daily, hourly service to others she had found the future of but little consequence, and had never, like other young girls, "made plans" for it. True she had dreamed of the Englishman, but his coming again to Harmonie had been for her but a divine accident, as every meeting with him since had been, and though she had surprised Tan' Linda by "finding her way to a man" unaided, to make of these acci-

dents the building material of a future to be shared with the Englishman was quite beyond her. Andrina knew only that the Englishman was here: that twice he had told her she was adorable, which for her meant greatly beloved: and that once he had kissed her. Beyond a prayer that he might some day kiss her again she never ventured. But she lived for that kiss.

To the future the Englishman gave scarcely more thought than did Andrina. In his rôle of invalid the present alone was his, and he would make the most of it, and of his independence. And quickly too, for that fellow, Jan Beyers, or whoever he was, might be cropping up again, and what now would life at Harmonie be without that young girl's rare shy beauty, her charm, her tears, her quick response to his moods, and her abandonment, so gentle, and yet so absolute, to his caresses? Andrina had answered to his touch, to his lips, as not one of his cousin Emily's daughters would yield to any man's . . . that flagpost Henrietta for instance . . . or Jane. As always when his thoughts reached his cousin Emily's daughters—and strangely at the time they travelled no farther than this—the young man became unjust, knew it, and continued wilfully to indulge in his injustice.

The Englishman had gone out to his own room from the dining-room when Tan' Linda hurried

off to the post-office, and for some time he sat there in a patch of sunlight by his table, smoking his pipe. Through the open doorway he could see straight down the wide path between the house and the garden, and beyond it to the poplar-grove, and beyond that to the church. From the church-land came the pleasant drowsy hum of a life which the midday heat was not yet strong enough to silence entirely. About the homestead too there was a constant coming and going, and only for Jantje and little Magdalena had Mevrouw to-day insisted on the midday rest. Andrina, the Englishman knew, was now settling the children in their room and would presently be leaving to join Tan' Linda in the post-office. He rose from the table and, taking up an inkpot lately filled for him from the larger one in the post-office, emptied it deliberately out of the window into the garden.

As she left the children's room Andrina heard the Englishman call her by name. To the young girl any call meant an appeal for help or for service to be rendered at once. She ran quickly down the stoep steps and crossed the path to the Englishman's room.

"Mijnheer called?" she asked. "There is something he needs?"

"It wasn't Mijnheer who called," said the Englishman, smiling at her eagerness.

"But, Mijnheer," said Andrina faintly, over-

come by the impertinence of her intrusion if he had not called, "just now . . . on the stoep . . . surely I did hear Mijnheer call?"

"Not Mijnheer," insisted the Englishman gently. "Have you forgotten my name so quickly, Andrina?"

"I have not forgotten it, Mijnheer," breathed Andrina, very low. She was rebuked, and still more rebuked when the Englishman said quietly: "Well?"

He waited. Andrina, breathing quickly, whispered at last:

"If Mijnheer means that it was Arry who called me, will Arry tell me what it is that he wants? Juffrouw de Neysen waits in the post-office."

"If Arry tells you all that he wants Juffrouw de Neysen will wait a long time in the post-office," said the Englishman. He held out his hand and, clasping hers, drew her towards him. "Do you know now what adorable means, Andrina?"

Andrina nodded. "I did look for it in the dictionary in the post-office," she said shyly.

"What!" cried the Englishman, throwing back his head with a shout of laughter. Then, seeing her distress, he added quickly: "And what did the post-office dictionary say?"

"If Mijnheer laughs how can I tell him?" asked Andrina, flushed and shaken. She freed her hand, but it was caught and held again. She felt

herself drawn towards him, yielding her body in ecstasy to his embrace. Her heart beat wildly, yet all her movements were quiet, and in the same childish way in which she had buried her head against Tan' Coba's shoulder in the orchard she now buried it against the Englishman's.

"Look up, Andrina!"

Andrina looked up, and in the face above her own there was no laughter now, only that dear, strange gravity which had so thrilled her the night before. The Englishman kissed her—her mouth, her brow, her eyes.

"It was for this I called you," he murmured. "For this and this . . . and this. Will you come when I call you again, Andrina?"

"Mijnheer knows," whispered Andrina.

"But why are you crying . . . why are you crying?"

"That also Mijnheer knows."

"No, he doesn't, Andrina. Mijnheer knows nothing. Nothing!"

"Arry then," whispered Andrina, smiling through her tears. "Arry knows." Gently, but with a decision which he did not attempt to frustrate, she freed herself from the Englishman's arms. In the doorway she turned. "Mijnheer is sure that he did not call me for something else that he needs?"

"Quite sure, Andrina. Quite, quite sure."

She was gone. And only when she had been some time gone did the young man remember his empty inkpot, his cousins Henrietta and Jane, and the fellow called Jan Beyers.

XIV

While Andrina and the Englishman lived wholly in the present, and Tan' Linda busied herself with the future, it was of the past that Jacoba thought—and the past for her, as for Aalst Vlokman, meant Klaartje.

Klara Andrina, the youngest by many years of Piet Steenkamp's three daughters, had been but a child when her mother died and Johanna, hard, righteous and curiously bitter for her age, began to rule her father's house. To her ruling, upheld by old Piet Steenkamp, who recognized in his eldest daughter his own grim Steenkamp uprightness, Jacoba, so incurably diffident and humble, had yielded without question. Klaartje, even as a child, had rebelled against it. In the end, in that wild and rebellious girlhood through which Jacoba alone had held her affection, she had fled from it.

Of Klaartje's flight from the valley to Platkops dorp Johanna could never think without shame, Jacoba without sorrow, or the beadle without remorse. It happened in the year that Aalst Vlokman, so surprisingly to Klaartje, came courting

gentle and timid Jacoba. To Klaartje, dear as she was, Jacoba was already a settled old maid (Johanna from her cradle had never been anything else) and in Aalst Vlokman the young girl saw nothing but a morose and gloomy elderly man. Aalst Vlokman was at that time riding transport between Platkops dorp and Princestown village, taking in the Aangenaam valley as occasion arose. He was much less ancient than his looks and his outlook on life suggested to the gay intolerance of Klaartje's youth, but that Jacoba loved him was no more amazing to Klaartje than it was to Johanna.

To Johanna the discovery that Jacoba loved Aalst Vlokman came, in fact, as a heavy blow. Jacoba was the one being whom she completely dominated, and moral domination was at once Johanna's craving and her curse, her weakness and her strength. If Aalst Vlokman married Jacoba, Jacoba would have but a change of masters for her soul, but what would there be left to Johanna? Whom then would she rule? Klaartje? No one would ever rule Klaartje. Not even, thought Johanna grimly, God Himself.

Though the elder woman had never actually forbidden, as in her complete domination she might well have done, Aalst Vlokman's courtship of Jacoba, she had from the first deliberately ignored the possibility of its ending in marriage.

To Aalst Vlokman she was cold, and warm only in resentment. To Jacoba she was both bullying and protective. Jacoba could accept with meekness the bullying of herself, but Johanna's treatment of Aalst Vlokman filled her with anguish. And gradually it roused in the transport-rider a resentment equal to Johanna's own. The battle between them was for the possession of Jacoba, and each of them knew it. But it was complicated, and held up indefinitely, by the intrusion of Klaartje.

Klaartje, gay, rebellious, laughter-loving, to tease Johanna and encourage the transport-rider, began flirting with Aalst Vlokman herself. Johanna must not be allowed to drive this gloomy, respectable, middle-aged man away from the house while her dear Jacoba, astounding as it was, seemed actually to love him. She, Klaartje, would do her best for them. And when they married she would go and live with them in Platkops dorp. She would do anything, anything! to get away from the valley to Platkops dorp. . . . Her talk to Aalst Vlokman was always of Platkops dorp. A distant cousin of her mother, Tan' Truitje, kept the coffee-house there. Tan' Truitje was a relative of whom neither Piet Steenkamp nor his daughter Johanna approved. But Klaartje began sending messages by Aalst Vlokman to Tan' Truitje, and Tan' Truitje not only sent mes-

sages back again but little gifts from one of the Platkops stores. Her youngest daughter had lately married and she would be glad, she said, if Klaartje would come and live with her at the coffee-house, as daughter and help, in Lijsbeth's place.

Of Tan' Truitje's invitation Klaartje spoke to no one, not even to her dear but old-maidish Jacoba. But she was more determined than ever now to get to Platkops dorp and impatient of the delay involved by the slowness of Aalst Vlokman's courtship. Daringly she took the transport-rider into her confidence. He must help her. He could see for himself what her sister Johanna was like, and her father had ears only for Johanna. She would die if she could not get away from Johanna to Tan' Truitje in Platkops dorp. Yes, die. And how would Aalst Vlokman like to think of her dead when he might now so easily save her? He had but to take her, hidden away in his wagon, on his next journey to Platkops dorp and her life would be saved.

Aalst Vlokman had saved her life. Secretly one evening she had joined his wagon while on a supposed visit to neighbours, and he had taken her to Tan' Truitje at the coffee-house. And he had arrived at the coffee-house with the knowledge, heavy as a sin upon his soul, that he was no longer Jacoba's lover but Klaartje's.

From the coffee-house Klaartje had refused to return to the valley when advised by the pastor to do so. The pastor, who did not see in Tan' Truitje—a kind-hearted and easy-going woman—the evil that was so apparent to Piet Steenkamp and his daughter Johanna, wrote to Mijnheer van der Merwe begging him to get Piet Steenkamp's parental consent for Klaartje to remain with her cousin. Piet Steenkamp's consent—or his daughter Johanna's—was given in three words: "Let her stay." His forgiveness he would not give. When on his visits to Harmonie the pastor spoke with him of Klaartje, he gave no answering word. Nor did Johanna. Only Jacoba, slipping up to the homestead, would beg for further news of her darling and send her, by the pastor, a few eggs, a few cinnamon biscuits, some dried fruit, perhaps, marvellously secreted from Johanna, and evidence at once of her poverty and her love.

Of Aalst Vlokman's full share in Klaartje's flight none but Jacoba at first had guessed. She alone had realized the nature of his slowly-awakened interest in the girl, and to the humble-minded woman it seemed but natural and inevitable that Klaartje should be preferred before her. What did not seem natural, what seemed indeed incomprehensible, was that Klaartje did not return his love. This added sorrow to her sorrow. She

longed to hear that Klaartje had married Aalst Vlokman. She was never to hear it.

To the grim satisfaction of Johanna, Aalst Vlokman came no more to the valley, and from the pastor Jacoba learnt that his work lay now from Platkops dorp up-country. Later he joined one of Mijnheer van der Merwe's sons on an expedition to the Kalahari desert, and rendering him good service there earned the gratitude of Mijnheer himself. Klaartje remained with Tan' Truitje at the coffee-house.

Every bit of news that came to her of Klaartje and of Aalst Vlokman Jacoba treasured. Against neither of them could she harbour any bitterness, of neither of them could she think any evil. Only when word came to the valley that Klaartje had married young Herman du Toit was she troubled. She begged then to be allowed to go to Platkops dorp to see her. She was forbidden. And when, a few months later, Klaartje, deserted by Herman du Toit, returned to the coffee-house and died in giving birth to Andrina, it was Johanna, not Jacoba, who went with her father to fetch the child. Herman du Toit had by then disappeared up-country. Klaartje's child was thus, said Johanna grimly, an orphan. And this was all that Johanna had ever deigned to tell the valley about Klaartje's child.

It was of these things that Jacoba thought as

she went slowly up to the house from the orchard —of these things and of Aalst Vlokman's return to the valley when Andrina was four years old. Thirteen years it was since he had come back to Harmonie with Mijnheer van der Merwe's son. Thirteen years had he worked the lands once worked for Mijnheer by old Piet Steenkamp, and thirteen years had he lived in the low mud house with old Piet Steenkamp's daughters. Thirteen years . . . and not once in all that time had he spoken to Jacoba of Klaartje—not once had he shown to Klaartje's child any kindness. Yet now, unknown to them all, he had offered his two plough-oxen to Jan Beyers as a marriage portion for Andrina—and Andrina had refused Jan Beyers.

XV

Of Andrina's refusal of Jan Beyers, making the sacrifice of his two plough-oxen futile, the beadle did not immediately learn. He was conscious, at the midday meal, of a peculiar ironic triumph in Johanna's attitude towards himself, and of a wordless sympathy in Jacoba's, both of which vaguely irritated and disturbed him. But neither Andrina nor Jan Beyers was mentioned. Nor, throughout the afternoon and evening, did he again come across the young man who was, in fact, not yet so intent upon the pursuit of Betje

Ferreira as to be careless of the possible inconvenience which a too early meeting with the beadle might cause him. The young man's progress, though now definitely in the direction of Betje and her sewing-machine, was still cautious.

The gathering round the church included now all those who had journeyed from a distance to witness the confirmation service (others might still be expected later for the Sacrament), and in the evening this service was held. Andrina, who had dressed at the homestead, so that, at Mevrouw's own wish, she might go down to the church with Mevrouw, wore the made-up white dress freshly ironed by Johanna. The secret of the little pink roses still lay in the sisters' wagon-chest awaiting the dawn of Sacrament Sunday.

As at the examination before the elders so now, for their confirmation, the candidates took their seats in separate groups of girls and boys before the pulpit. The rest of the congregation, Johanna and Jacoba among them, sat in the body of the church. The beadle occupied his stool in front of the vestry door. He was free to-night from the torture of self-examination, but until the question of her marriage with Jan Beyers was settled his mind could not be at rest, or his heart at peace, about Klaartje's Andrina. To-morrow, if nothing were said to him by Johanna (Jacoba, he knew, would not be allowed by Johanna to speak),

he would seek out the young man himself. . . . There were other things perhaps that he could add to his oxen. . . . Yes. . . . But surely Jan Beyers could not forgo his oxen! Surely the Lord would not refuse his sacrifice! Surely Johanna would insist upon Andrina's accepting so good a match as Jan Beyers! Everything pointed to the success of his scheme for saving Andrina from the Englishman, yet nothing brought him assurance.

The service, so simple and yet so moving to those who took part in it, passed almost unheeded by Aalst Vlokman. Of the pastor's address to the candidates he heard little, and what he heard seemed but to make his share in the question of Andrina's marriage, and safety in marriage, more urgent. As in the arbour to Andrina so now in the pulpit it was on the fatherhood of God that the pastor dwelt, and on the duties of those who, by joining the church, acknowledged themselves His children and accepted the responsibilities of their sonship. There were some, said the pastor, who had no earthly father. Let them remember that they were never out of the care of their heavenly Father. Try as he might no man could escape the justice of God, but let them remember also, as His children, that no man could escape His care, His mercy, and His love. In earthly relationships parents might forget what they owed

to their children and remember only the duty that their children owed to them. With God there was no forgetting, no failing in His care, no stinting of His mercy, no withdrawing of His love. And was there a man before him now who could answer before his God that he had not once but many times failed his children in justice and in mercy, in care and in love?

After this strange close to his address it was through a mist of tears that Jacoba saw her darling bow in affirmation to the promises made on her behalf by the pastor. The beadle saw nothing. Only when the pastor came down from the pulpit to greet each candidate with a handshake as an accepted member of the church did he rouse himself to something more than a mechanical interest in his duties. Standing in front of the pulpit was an elder, who read aloud the names of the new members as each in turn moved up to the pastor. At the name of Andrina du Toit a force stronger than his will compelled the beadle to raise his head and look across the church. His gaze met Johanna's and was answered by a slow and ironic twist of Johanna's grim lips.

XVI

On the following morning the beadle went down earlier than was his custom to open the church and see that all was in order there. He had slept badly and this added to the gloom of his outlook. His body was now, like his mind, in need of rest and for neither in his present uncertainty about Andrina's future could he obtain rest. Somehow, but not too obviously, he must seek out Jan Beyers and learn the fate of his letter to Andrina. But it was not easy for him to walk casually through the church-land in search of Jan Beyers. Beadle though he was, and intense as was the brooding, speechless love he had for the church, in the church-lands he was a stranger. No man greeted him with affection there and some, he knew, deliberately avoided him. It was not that he was an outcast. To be an outcast one must first have been a member of the community from which one is expelled. And never, in spite of his position as beadle, had Aalst Vlokman been accepted as member of the Aangenaam community. He owed his position entirely to services rendered to Mijnheer's son up-country, and from it he had made no advances himself and had repulsed the advances of others. To go through the church-land in search of Jan Beyers now was something of an ordeal to him.

Jan Beyers had outspanned at the far end of the church-land. To reach him there, casually, would be as great an achievement for the beadle as to reach the North Pole would be to a more adventurous spirit. But, with no clear idea as to what he would say to the young man when he met him, Aalst Vlokman set out. Half-way across the land he was greeted by a thin and old, but not unpleasant voice from a covered wagon.

"Beadle!" cried the voice. "Beadle! How goes it with you, beadle?"

The beadle turned aside and approached the wagon. On the swinging bed-frame lay old Betje Ferreira, come to Harmonie for her last Sacrament. The old woman was a pleasant, friendly soul whom pain had neither intimidated nor embittered. Never had she expected to make this journey to Harmonie again. Never had she expected to partake again of the Lord's Supper. Yet, praise be to God for His goodness and mercy, here she was, and to all, even to the morose and gloomy beadle, she must proclaim it.

"Look, beadle," she said, holding out her hand in greeting, "is it not a miracle that the Lord has worked for me? Such kindness as is shown to me here by all in the church-land! Look now, this wagon that Mijnheer de Jager lent to my son Hans to bring me here . . . his oxen also! In all the Aangenaam valley there is not such an-

other son as my son Hans is to me. No, surely there is not, nor such a grandchild as his daughter Betje either. . . . And now this day I shall take the Sacrament with them, I that never thought to come again to Harmonie. Beadle, have I not much to thank the Lord for?"

"You have that," answered Aalst Vlokman, "and all men can see that you thank Him." He spoke with conviction. How it had happened he could not say, but the old woman's greeting had moved him as he had not, for many years, been moved by anything which did not concern himself or Klaartje's Andrina. Her wagon was for him an oasis in that wilderness of unfriendly souls which he must cross to reach Jan Beyers. And never before, in all the thirteen years of his service, had Aalst Vlokman struck such an oasis.

The old woman smiled in content.

"And why," said she, "should I hide it from them that I thank Him? Much, much I have to praise Him for! My grandchild Betje, now—my son Hans's daughter—she that from a little child has looked after me. Know you what He has done for her, our heavenly Father?"

"What has He done, Mevrouw?"

"Have you not then heard?" cried old Betje, who in the friendliness of her own soul could never easily grasp the isolation of another's. "Have you not then heard? All through the

church-land it is known already that Jan Beyers last night brought my granddaughter Betje a letter and asked her to marry him. Yes, Jan Beyers, that men said always would never take him a wife that was poor, brought a letter that went: 'My beloved Betje, long, long have I loved you. . . .' Yes, to our child he brought it, though well he knew she had little but her sewing-machine to take to the man that she marries. . . ."

"And is she then to marry him," asked the beadle, gripping hold of a spoke in the wagon wheel, "—your Betje?"

"Surely," cried the old woman, triumphant. "Is it not a miracle in Jan Beyers that the Lord has worked for our Betje? And is it for us to go against the miracles of the Lord? No, no, beadle! Well you know that a man may try but never can he escape the will of God!"

The beadle knew it. Useless now would be his journey to the far corner of the land. Useless was the offer of his two plough-oxen to Jan Beyers. The Lord had refused his sacrifice. He turned and, blind to all around him, went back to the church.

XVII

RUNNING quickly down the pathway from the homestead to the low mud house came Andrina, to join her aunts for the Sacrament. In the doorway, in her best black calico gown and sun-bonnet, stood Johanna, Bible in hand, ready and waiting.

"Be quick then, Andrina," she said. "Tan' Coba waits in the room."

Andrina ran into the room. Jacoba, also in her best black calico gown and sun-bonnet, stood at the head of the bed. Spread out on the bed was that glory of little pink roses and little blue flowers, the new Sacrament dress.

"Tan' Coba," cried Andrina.

She stopped short, gazing at the miracle on the bed—then swift as a bird was in Tan' Coba's arms.

"It is from Tan' Johanna," said Jacoba, holding her fast. "She gave it. She made it! Tan' Johanna, my darling!"

"Tan' Johanna," cried Andrina, "Tan' Johanna."

She turned. Johanna, grim, forbidding, Bible in hand stood now in the bedroom doorway. Andrina went shyly, quickly towards her. Not for many years now had Johanna kissed or embraced her niece or been kissed and embraced by her.

For a second Andrina hesitated, then suddenly, mastering her shyness, put her arms round Tan' Johanna's neck, kissed her stern lips, and very gently pressed her soft round cheek against the withered brown one.

Johanna was moved. She had bought the print to revenge herself upon the beadle. The news of Andrina's refusal of Jan Beyers had added to the bitter-sweet satisfaction of her revenge. But Andrina's delight, her gratitude, her quick, shy caress aroused within her a deeper and nobler emotion. Yet all she said was, somewhat sharply:

"Be quick then, Andrina."

Quickly Andrina slipped out of the "made-up" white dress she had worn on the previous day and stood shyly before her aunts in her plain white calico underslip and petticoat. She was painfully conscious before them of the size of her firm round breasts filling out the plain white expanse of her slip. She was unhappy about her breasts, and, though she could not say why, ashamed of them. They were one of the many mysteries of her mysteriously developing body—and she was afraid of her body. That her breasts were the glory of her dawning womanhood was a fact which she was as yet incapable of realizing. If she had known how to make them small again she would have made them small. In some strange way their size seemed not only a reproach to her-

self but a reproach to Tan' Johanna. With Tan' Jacoba it was different. Even shameful things were somehow robbed of their shame in Jacoba's gentle presence.

It was Jacoba who held up the new dress and drew it over her shoulders and buttoned it across her breast. It fitted. The miracle was complete.

"Look then, Johanna," cried Jacoba in triumphant amazement. Surely the Lord had guided Johanna's shears! Surely He had guided her needle!

Johanna smiled grimly. Whatever were her feelings, no further emotion did she mean to display. Yet it was she who suddenly took down the little mirror from behind the door and held it out to Andrina.

"See how it sits at the neck," she said.

Andrina took the mirror, and began suddenly to tremble. Was it herself she saw in that little crystal well deep within its rim of shells? Was this the Englishman's "adorable child"? Was it those eyes, those lips, that the Englishman had kissed? Was she indeed beautiful enough, as she saw herself now, for the Englishman to love? She could not believe it. She dared not hope it. Panic seized her and, speechless, she returned the mirror to Tan' Johanna.

"Be quick now," said Johanna, replacing it on the wall.

Andrina tied on her stiffly starched white sunbonnet, so like the white tent of a wagon, took up her Bible and followed her aunts out of the little house. In the church-land old Jafta was ringing the bell which had once been the slave-bell, and men, women and children were moving slowly in little groups towards the church. The morning air was crisp and bright and clear, the sky cloudless. For Stephan van der Merwe the scene around the church, the white tented wagons, the dying fires at which had been prepared the early coffee and breakfasts, the patient, grazing cattle in the veld around the land, the fresh, yellow-green of the poplar bush, the square white church with its dark thatched roof, and the people moving towards the door at the call of the old slave-bell, was a scene which year after year never failed to move him. And never before had it failed, as to-day it failed, to move, with a more bitter intensity, Aalst Vlokman, the beadle.

Within the church, his mind held by the thought that the Lord had refused his sacrifice, Aalst Vlokman went about his duties like a man groping his way through an evil dream. Old Tan' Betje had been carried into the church and made comfortable on a low wooden bed-frame. Young Betje was with her, and by her side, sheepish yet somehow conveying an air of bravado, sat Jan Beyers. In the Harmonie seats were Mijnheer and Mev-

rouw, Jantje and his parents, Tan' Linda and the Englishman. The Englishman had come at his own urgent request. He knew enough Dutch, he thought, to follow part of the service and this was surely a way of learning more. He was encouraged, surprisingly, in this venture by Tan' Linda. The beadle, strangely fatalistic now, accepted his presence as but another proof that his sacrifice had not been acceptable to his God.

Among the last of the congregation to enter were Johanna and Jacoba Steenkamp with their niece Andrina. Johanna came first, moving with her accustomed grim determination to the opposite side of the passage-way from that occupied by the Harmonie household. Jacoba, with beating heart, followed her sister. So agitated was Jacoba that it might have been she, not Johanna, who had bought the print and so daringly cut it. It might have been she, not the beadle, who, in the face of the congregation, was to receive this amazing proof of Johanna's moral temerity. So did timid, gentle Jacoba invariably burden her heart with the possible anxieties and sufferings of others. And the shock to the beadle now was all that Johanna had hoped for, all that Jacoba had feared.

As the sisters entered the church, Aalst Vlokman was mounting the pulpit with the pastor's Bible. He looked down from the pulpit upon them, and, as they took their seats, saw Klaartje's

Andrina stand for a second alone in the passage-way in all the shy glory of her new Sacrament dress. She did not, as in his agony he expected her to do, smile across to the Englishman in the Harmonie pew. She looked neither to right nor to left out of the deep white tent of her sun-bonnet. But in that bitter moment of Johanna's triumph it was to the beadle as if God, having first refused his sacrifice, had dealt him now a deliberate blow.

XVIII

The communion service was over and in the brilliant sunshine in front of the church door men and women greeted each other and spoke kindly to the young communicants. Andrina, standing shyly by the side of her aunts, listened to the talk around her but took no part in it. She was happy, and though in her communion Christ had still remained a vague and shadowy figure to her, and His sacrifice an incomprehensible mystery, her heart had been drawn as it had never been drawn before to the serene, beneficent and gentle God who had brought the Englishman back to Harmonie and given her the new print dress. What had she done to deserve such joy as the Englishman brought her? She could not tell. She could not deserve it. It was as far beyond the limits of her deserts as was the sky above the

heavens. There was indeed, to her simplicity and innocence, but one explanation—she owed her dear and secret happiness directly to the Heavenly Father of whose love and care the pastor had assured her.

The little group in front of the doorway was joined by Mevrouw who, greeting Johanna and Jacoba, begged that Andrina might return to the homestead at once. She could not, she said, get on without Andrina's help. More and more, as she now grew old, did she depend upon the child. Was she selfish? Then they must forgive an old woman's selfishness and remember the place that Andrina held in her heart. Seldom had she helped to prepare a candidate whose confirmation had so pleased her as Andrina's. It had been a joy to her to see the child receive the Sacrament with her aunts. She knew it had been a joy to them to receive it with her. Might Andrina long be spared to them, and they to Andrina, in the never-failing care of our Father.

Andrina, blushing a little in the depths of her sun-bonnet at Mevrouw's praise, had taken leave of her aunts and set off swiftly for the homestead. As she passed the poplar-grove, some one called to her gently, urgently, commandingly: "Andrina! Andrina! Andrina!" and the beadle, from the vestry window, saw the Englishman join her. . . .

Half an hour later the beadle went up to the low mud house for his midday meal. He knew that he must not expect to find Andrina with her aunts, yet, as he took his seat, he said morosely:

"Where then is Andrina?"

"And where would she be but with Mevrouw at the house," answered Johanna sharply. Her triumph had left Johanna unexpectedly nervous and irritable, and the sharpness of her tone now betrayed her. The beadle, with the cunning of bitterness and suffering, was quick to seize the advantage it gave him.

"Is it then a doll that Mevrouw now wants in her house?" he asked.

Johanna controlled herself.

"Well you know, Aalst Vlokman," she said, "that Andrina is no doll."

"Is she not? Is she not?" cried the beadle. And he added bitterly: "Like a doll in a Platkops store was she dressed this day for the Sacrament, and all the world could see it!"

Johanna made no answer. Jacoba, glancing swiftly from her sister to Aalst Vlokman, hung her head so that they might not see her foolish tears. A doll! A doll! Her darling a doll? And as if in direct reply to this cry from her heart the beadle repeated:

"Like a doll have you dressed her—a doll for the Englishman to play with."

The beadle's reference to the Englishman, so startling to Jacoba, made, surprisingly, little impression upon Johanna, for it was now that that grim and silent woman gave expression to the accumulated bitterness of years. Exasperated beyond the endurance of her present and unaccustomed nervous irritability, she turned on the beadle and said:

"Tell me now, Aalst Vlokman, is it for you to say how Andrina shall dress? . . . By what right should you say it? Is it for you to choose the man that Andrina shall marry? . . . By what right should you choose him? Is it for you to give your plough-oxen to the man that she marries? . . . By what right should you give them? What is Klaartje's child to you? Answer me that, Aalst Vlokman! Answer me that!"

It was not Aalst Vlokman who spoke, but Jacoba.

"Johanna," she cried imploringly, "Johanna!"

"Be still, then, Jacoba!" cried Johanna sharply. And to the beadle she said, grimly, triumphantly: "Well you know what your right is, Aalst Vlokman, and well I know it. Make known your right to all the world and afterwards it will be for you to say what Andrina shall wear and whom she shall marry. But not till your right is known to all the world shall you say it!"

Again Jacoba cried imploringly: "Johanna! Johanna!"

But Johanna, careless now of whom else she might wound in wounding the beadle, and bent upon wounding him further, was not to be checked.

"Look now, Aalst Vlokman," she said. "The day that you spoke before the child of the things that were said in Platkops dorp about Klaartje, that day it was that I went down to the Jew-woman's store and got the print for Andrina's dress. But Jacoba—she also went. She also, because of the things that you said that day, bought a present for Klaartje's Andrina. Wait now, and you shall see it."

She rose from the table and, going into the bedroom, returned with the little shell-rimmed mirror.

"Look now, Aalst Vlokman," she said, propping it up against a dish on the table before him, "look well now into Jacoba's present, for there you will see the face of the man that took Klaartje to Platkops dorp and yet thinks he can say what Andrina shall wear and whom she shall marry!"

For a second Aalst Vlokman looked. But the face he saw was not the face of the man who had taken Klaartje to Platkops dorp. It was the face of a man abandoned by his God. In a bitter

desolation of spirit—his sacrifice refused, his fears ignored, his weakness taunted—he rose from the table and left the house. His rising jerked the mirror from its rest against the dish. It slid across the table, slipped over the edge, and fell with a crash against the beadle's stool.

PART III

I

AFTER the Sacrament life slipped quickly into its quieter groove at Harmonie. The little gathering round the church dispersed: the pastor returned to Platkops dorp: Magdalena and her parents went back to their farm in the Caroline district. Only Jantje and the Englishman remained at Harmonie. Jantje was not yet strong enough, Mevrouw thought, for the long journey to Caroline. And to comfort him for the loss of Magdalena it was arranged that Andrina should stay on at the homestead, taking full charge of him and "teaching him school."

The suggestion that Andrina should remain at the homestead had come from that romantic instrument of God, Tan' Linda, eager now to do all she could on behalf of the young girl and the Englishman. Instinct warned her against any coy or arch display of sympathy such as was expected by other young couples under her wing and such as, in fact, she delighted to give. Neither Andrina nor the Englishman, she decided, must guess that she knew their secret, and in all things concerning them she behaved with a discretion for which at times she needed

all her self-control. She was rewarded by deliciously perilous moments, in which it seemed to her that the bomb which she hugged to her heart must explode before she was free to fling it. And she found what vent she could for her feelings in talk of Jan Beyers's coming marriage to Betje Ferreira. For this match she took full credit, and the fact that her first choice for Jan Beyers had been Andrina was a fact that she had not the slightest difficulty in forgetting. In Tan' Linda's mind Andrina was now, and had always been, her own unaided choice for the Englishman. She was also in Tan' Linda's mind the established descendant of the famous pastor Steenkamp (surely he had been famous!) and so in every way the Englishman's equal. In fact, probably his superior, for she had never yet heard the Englishman mention a pastor in his family, and would he not, after all these weeks, have mentioned the pastor in his family had there been one? Oh, there was no doubt about it! Andrina was certainly good enough for the Englishman, and it was a brilliant thought of hers to suggest to good and simple Alida that Andrina should remain at the homestead and teach school to little Jantje.

Tan' Linda's first brilliant thought was quickly followed by a second. Scarcely had the Englishman grasped the fact that Andrina had now added

teaching to her many duties in the household, when Tan' Linda made her next proposal. Jantje was a quick and eager pupil and, praising his progress one day at the midday meal, Tan' Linda suddenly suggested that the Englishman should teach him English. Andrina, she urged, restraining a natural impulse to archness, might also benefit by the Englishman's lessons to Jantje. Here, exercising with difficulty a wise restraint, Tan' Linda grew beamingly silent, and it was Frikkie who, to the consternation of his family, pursued the subject.

For the Englishman, as a pupil-farmer, Frikkie van der Merwe had had, from the first, nothing but contempt. The Englishman's attitude to life in general and to farming in particular was incomprehensible to this young and earnest Dutchman, who had all his father's intense love of the lands, but little, as yet, of that patience and faith in awaiting the slow fulfilment of the promises of God in nature and in man which gave to Stephan van der Merwe his nobility of mind. In the Englishman, who lived only, it seemed, to laugh and to ride and to shoot, Frikkie could see no promise of a farmer whatever, and that he should pose as one was an insult which for some time he had strongly resented. He was a silent youth, but not a shy one, and now and then he broke his silence by delivering himself of opin-

ions, arrived at after long and deep consideration, from which nothing in the arguments of his astonished hearers could move him. And on the subject of the Englishman as a pupil-farmer he broke his silence now.

"No, what, Mijnheer!" he said. "Though you should ride about our lands for still another hundred years, it is not a farmer that you will be when they come to help you out of the saddle. Do now as Tan' Linda says and the whole of your day will not then perhaps be wasted, as surely it is wasted now." And he added, raising his voice obstinately above the agitated protests of his family: "No, what, Mijnheer! They may say now what they like, but it will go hard with you if you cannot teach school better than you have learnt farming, and though I alone have said it to you, there is not one of us in the room that does not think it."

Frikkie's verdict, so perturbing to his family in its ruthless honesty and vehemence, was accepted by the Englishman with an easy good-nature which damned him still further in the young Dutchman's eyes, though it eased the situation for Tan' Linda and his parents. The Englishman could, when occasion arose, face facts as honestly as did Frikkie himself—but unlike the Dutchman he faced them with a good-humour which was both a weapon against the

world and a shield against his own conscience. The justice now of Frikkie's criticism he did not deny. It was no real interest in farming that had brought him to Harmonie, but a whim, a caprice, which the plea of ill-health had made it possible for him to gratify and for which he had sought still further excuse by claiming the right to complete freedom of action. He had come to Harmonie, in short, to escape from the boredom of Princestown, and he was ready now for any change by which he might lessen, if not escape from, the steadily increasing boredom of farming. And this particular change, he thought, looking down the table at Andrina, was full of possibilities. Andrina had not yet begun to bore him.

He turned, smiling, to Mevrouw. There was no doubt, he said, that he would never make a farmer. Frikkie was right. Let them all admit it. But if he might still be allowed to ride about the farm: if he might still be allowed to shoot: if Mijnheer would still make use of any services he was fit to render: and if Mevrouw, for the good of his health, would still accept him as her guest, he would be delighted to turn schoolmaster to all the pupils anxious to learn English that Tan' Linda could find for him. And he would begin that very afternoon with little Jantje and Andrina.

To all of this Mevrouw, still sorrowing over Frikkie's rudeness to their guest, agreed with gentle head-shaking. Mijnheer accepted it with no comment beyond the unspoken one which lay in his wise, far-seeing glance at the young man. Jantje was delighted. Frikkie was grimly satisfied. Tan' Linda was enchanted. Andrina alone, whom none had consulted, was troubled. In a panic that was half fear and half joy, she slipped unnoticed from the table to Jantje's room and knelt down by the side of her bed. But she could not tell whether it was to appeal to her Heavenly Father for help or to thank Him for this last sign of His love and His care for her that she knelt there.

II

THE Englishman's first class, to please the urgent Jantje, was held in the Englishman's outside room. Here Andrina cleared the big yellow-wood table of its accumulated litter of papers, pipes and tobacco. A second rimpje chair and a high stool for Jantje were carried across from the homestead. A slate was provided for the small boy and from the post-office Andrina brought her own pen and the tattered English dictionary in which she had first learned

the meaning of the word adorable. To these were added an English Bible of Tan' Linda's, the old volume of *Chatterbox* and a *First Reading Book,* in which mysterious beings were for ever going up and on and in. The Englishman, who had brought with him to Harmonie no library of his own and who had hitherto found his weekly supply of English papers sufficient for his intellectual needs, set the reading book aside for Jantje and plunged at random, running his hands despairingly through his hair, on the Book of Job for Andrina. But, he announced, it was practice in English conversation that Andrina most needed and for this neither the adventures of Harry in *Chatterbox,* nor the afflictions of Job in Tan' Linda's Bible were absolutely necessary. With the help of the dictionary alone, there was much he could teach her—much that he was anxious and impatient to teach her—if she were but willing to learn. Was she willing?

"Mijnheer knows," answered Andrina very low. His earnestness, implying a deeper meaning than his words suggested, set her heart fluttering wildly under her plain print bodice. The Englishman, she knew, was not referring to "school" as she understood it, but anything that he desired to teach her she was willing to learn. She was indeed more than willing—she was anxious to

learn. Her mind, her heart, her soul—all these were now his and he might do what he would with them.

"Mijnheer knows," she said again. "Let him do as it seems right to him."

Her acquiescence, so gentle and yet so absolute, was like a child's. The young man was moved, and once again Andrina was conscious of that gravity in his gaze which was so dear to her. He was grave, however, only for a moment. Taking up his pen, he wrote, with a smile, a list of words, of which Andrina, with no help from the dictionary, was to write out the meaning in English. Later, when he could judge better how much English she really knew, he would set her essays on subjects that they could discuss together.

"Essays?" queried Andrina, at a loss.

"Yes. Don't you know what an essay is? Some day I'll say to you, 'Andrina! Set down for me in writing all that you know about love.' And what you set down for me will be an essay."

"Oh!" cried Andrina, alarmed. But already the Englishman had turned to Jantje with the reading book and her protest went unheeded. In front of her lay the list of words and at the head of it, clearer than all the rest, was the word "Adorable." Had Mijnheer put it there to tease her? She could not tell. He made no sign as

she glanced up quickly, trying to read his face, yet by the pose of his head, by the tone of his voice as he went steadily up and on and in with little Jantje, she was moved to a sudden, overwhelming, terrifying consciousness of the hunger of her body for his. In the anguish of this awakening, she gave a short, half-stifled cry. The Englishman turned.

"What is it, Andrina?" he asked. "What frightened you?"

Andrina, gazing at him like a child imploring for help, made no reply. As if in answer to the cry of her body for his touch, his caress, the Englishman drew her hand into his and said quietly:

"Don't be afraid, Andrina. I shall teach you nothing that you don't want to learn. You trust me?"

Andrina, still speechless, nodded. If she could not trust him now that her love was his, whom in all the world should she trust?

"Then I can make you happy. I want to make you happy. That is what I'm here for."

"Mijnheer!"

"Well, isn't it?"

"Mijnheer came here to learn farming," said Andrina in a low voice.

The Englishman smiled. "But you heard today that I'll never make a farmer, so why did I

come here to learn? What was it brought me back? Who was it?"

And as Andrina, trembling now in every limb, made no answer, he said quietly and firmly, comforting her heart as his touch comforted her body:

"You know why I came! You know why I stay! Don't you, Andrina?"

"I cannot think it is for me," whispered Andrina.

"But if I tell you that it is for you? What then, Andrina?"

"If Mijnheer says it, then I must believe him."

"Very well then . . . He says it. Believe him, Andrina. It is for your sake that he is here."

Releasing her hand he turned again to little Jantje and once more went up and on and in with his small pupil. For a moment Andrina sat motionless. Then, slowly drawing a sheet of paper towards her, she took up her pen and wrote in small, clear characters Adorable—greatly beloved.

III

Down in old Piet Steenkamp's house Johanna's change of attitude towards the beadle, a source of constant distress to Jacoba, grew harder and fiercer with time. In Johanna victory had given birth not to pity but

to a righteous lust for still further revenge against Aalst Vlokman. Unconscious though she was of the part played in the beadle's fears by the Englishman, she knew that Andrina's being at the homestead displeased him and aroused in him that morose jealousy of Klaartje's child by which he could most easily be made to suffer. And suffer now he should. She who had borne with him in a bitter silence for over thirteen years would bear with him in silence no longer. Her warfare now would be open. So long as the beadle remained with them she would exercise her right—and she considered it a right—to taunt him, to torture him, secure herself in the sense of her own virtue and regardless of those scruples which for thirteen years had kept her silent. At meals it was Johanna now who spoke, gazing straight at the beadle, and Aalst Vlokman who lowered his head and kept silence. In Johanna's bitter, jeering remarks and in the beadle's dumb acceptance of them there was something terrible to gentle, timid Jacoba. Meals became an agony to her, in which the slight pain round her heart grew so intense as to make her want to cry out. But she did not cry out. Like many other simple and fearful women, Jacoba persuaded herself that she had but to ignore her pain to be cured of it. Yet it began to trouble her now not only at meals

with Johanna and the beadle, but whenever she grew anxious about Andrina.

The hint in the beadle's reference to Andrina and the Englishman, so strangely lost upon Johanna, had disturbed Jacoba greatly. Was it the Englishman, then, whom Andrina loved and could not name? And if she loved him, what lay before her but sorrow? Would the Englishman marry her? Jacoba did not think so. In Jacoba's limited experience love had not meant marriage. Tan' Linda might build castles in Spain for pastor Steenkamp's descendant, but such presumption was far beyond the powers of Jacoba's timid and humble imagination. Why had she not warned the child in the little orchard of the sorrows of love? Why could she not warn her now? What was it that kept her silent? She could not say. She knew only that to speak of love as she and Klaartje and Aalst Vlokman had known it was beyond her. Day and night she prayed that Andrina might escape such suffering as had once been hers. Day and night her thoughts, her prayers, her tears were all for Klaartje's child. But with these alone how could she hope to save her?

She thought sometimes of appealing to Johanna, but what should she say to Johanna, who was now so strange in the things she said and did? Johanna had never understood what she

felt about Klaartje—how then would she understand what she felt about Andrina? There was one alone who might understand—Aalst Vlokman, the beadle. But how could she speak to Aalst Vlokman, who had never once addressed her since learning from Johanna that it was she, Jacoba, who had given Andrina the mirror? He blamed her, she knew, for giving Andrina her mirror, but Jacoba could see no sin in Andrina's possessing a mirror: no sin in Andrina's seeing herself as others saw her. Sin was a word that had no meaning for Jacoba where Andrina was concerned. Unlike the beadle, it was not sin that Jacoba feared for her darling, but sorrow.

It had been Andrina's custom to run down to see her aunts every afternoon after the midday rest, but on the day of the Englishman's first class it was not until Jacoba came up towards the graves for her goats that Andrina was free to join her.

"Could Mevrouw then not spare you?" asked Jacoba, as Andrina kissed her.

"I go now with Jantje, after his rest, to learn English of the Englishman," explained Andrina shyly. "This day it was arranged."

Jacoba, suddenly conscious of the pain about her heart, breathed quickly and shortly.

"Are you not glad, Tan' Coba, that I now learn real English?" asked Andrina anxiously.

"My little one," answered Jacoba, "what is it that you would say in English?"

With a quick, childish movement Andrina pressed Tan' Coba's arm close against her own. Her heart was full of the things which she wished to say in English—foolish, tender things,—but how could she breathe them even to Tan' Coba?

"Can you not tell me, Andrintje?" asked Jacoba, and added with difficulty, as Andrina remained silent, "I also once carried such words in my heart as I could not speak."

"Tan' Coba," cried Andrina with the innocent and inoffensive incredulity of youth. "Tan' Coba!"

"Yes, I also," repeated Jacoba. "I also."

It was as a warning that Jacoba had made this sudden confession, and when Andrina, in amazement and sympathy, asked:

"Did he die, then—the man that once you loved?" it was to drive this warning home that she cried:

"Why should he die, Andrintje? Why should he die? Death is but one end to love. There are others that are harder."

For a moment, at Jacoba's cry, fear swept into Andrina's heart. What was this that Tan' Coba was saying? How could Tan' Coba speak like this of any end to love that was not death? Death

alone could be stronger than love! Death alone could end it! Surely, surely this was so. Surely if Tan' Coba had ever loved as she, Andrina, loved the Englishman she must know it. She looked up into Jacoba's face, and Jacoba, seeing the pain and fear in her eyes, felt her heart grow numb and her courage fail. There was more, she knew, that ought to be said, but how could she say it? How could she speak of what she herself had suffered without betraying the secret which was not hers alone? She did not know, and as she hesitated, seeking painfully for that wisdom which was denied her, Andrina smiled. Half in relief, half in anxiety Jacoba cried weakly:

"Andrintje!"

But Andrina did not hear. As suddenly as it had come upon her, her fear had vanished. Fear? It was a treachery, an absurdity! Had not the Englishman himself asked her to trust him? And had she not promised to do so? Had he not told her that he was remaining at Harmonie to make her happy? Happy? Happy? How poor a word was happiness for the joy that now was hers! Even the grave, she thought, would be powerless to rob her of it. Even from the grave would she whisper those foolish, tender words which love had taught her . . .

"Did you speak, then, Tan' Coba," she asked at

last, coming back slowly to the world around her.

"It was nothing, my little one," said Jacoba. "It was nothing. Let us go."

IV

As his days now were planned the Englishman spent his mornings much as usual, riding about the farm with Mijnheer or visiting distant lands, camps and kraals with Frikkie, who, grown tolerant of a guest who no longer posed as a would-be farmer, accepted his company with a certain dry friendliness. His afternoons were given up entirely to his two pupils, Andrina and Jantje.

For Jantje the progress through the *First Reading Book* was a great and glorious adventure, and his small world was rapidly becoming peopled with a strange new race of beings, hardly human, who were for ever mysteriously going up and on and in. When his lessons were over, he would sit content at his end of the table, drawing pictures of these industrious creatures and their homes for Ou-ma to send in her letters to Magdalena. The Englishman, partly with the desire to give Jantje pleasure, and partly with the desire to keep him well-occupied, sent an order to one of the Princestown stores for a box of paints. These paints—little square slabs which

had to be ground, and for which, when ground, shallow round dishes were provided—threw Jantje into a delirium of excitement and made the Englishman more than ever his friend. With his paint-box Jantje was lost to the world and the Englishman was free to devote himself entirely to Andrina.

As a pupil Andrina was no less surprising to the young man than she had been as an unexplained member of the Harmonie household. Her detachment from the world which lay beyond the mountains, and her shy eagerness to learn all that she could of it as it concerned himself, impressed and moved him strangely. Never, since the day when old Piet Steenkamp and his daughter Johanna had brought her, an infant, from Platkops dorp in the borrowed ox-cart, had Andrina been out of the valley. All that she knew of life she had learned here, at Harmonie, from the men and women around her and from the only book they ever read—the Bible. Yet in her judgments the young girl was never narrow as his Princestown cousins were narrow, and never intolerant as youth is intolerant. With her innocence of mind, which was not merely the ignorance of inexperience, and of which no experience was ever completely to rob her, there went an outlook on life of such direct simplicity that to the young man it seemed courageous. All that was finest

in his nature was touched by this innocence of mind, this purity of soul. All that was most selfish and possessive in him was excited by her beauty and gentleness and by the strange, unquestioning abandonment of her shy young body to his caresses. Her charm for him lay in these. Her beauty, her grace, her gentleness were gifts direct from the gods. And to the gods would he give thanks for them.

Of her gifts Andrina herself remained as unaware as she was of any God but Jehovah. In the little mirror rimmed with shells she had seen no beauty that was worthy of the Englishman's regard. Yet the fact that she had nothing to bring him save her love made for her but a greater glory of his tenderness towards her and turned her very poverty to riches. All that new sweet joy which she had been assured would be hers when she joined the church and, as an acknowledged child of God, partook of the Sacrament, was now indeed hers, and though it reached her through the Englishman and not through the Redeemer of the world, she had no doubt that it came from her Heavenly Father. In all that concerned her love for the Englishman she saw, in her shy and gentle ardour, evidence of that care of the Heavenly Father for His children of which the pastor had spoken. It was God—for what did she know of the boredom of Princestown?—who

had brought the Englishman back to Harmonie. It was God—what did she know of the feud between Johanna and the beadle?—who had put it into the heart of Tan' Johanna to give her the new Sacrament dress. It was God—what did she know of Tan' Linda's scheming?—who had put it into the heart of Mevrouw to keep her at the homestead in charge of little Jantje. And it was God who had put it into the heart of Tan' Linda to suggest that the Englishman should teach her English. Life to Andrina was full of such simple and natural and tenderly miraculous proofs as these of a divine interest in the welfare of her love.

Of the future the girl never consciously thought. Those hopes and plans which make the day-dreams of youth had never been hers, and her incurable humility, with her incurable instinct to spend herself in service to others, kept her from indulging in them even now. To hope with Andrina was to pray, and she who had now so much to thank Heaven for could not bring herself to ask for more. All that the Englishman gave her she accepted with a gratitude that was never qualified by criticism. All that it was in her power to give she gave. And day by day a little more was demanded of her. And day by day, with the abandonment of a gentle savage and

the unquestioning ardour of a childlike saint, her joy in giving deepened.

As the clear spring days grew warmer with the approaching heat of summer, Andrina would often, after their class in the outside room, take Jantje for walks up on the mountain-side towards the mill, and frequently the Englishman joined them. While Jantje chased the little conies among the rocks, or collected lumps of quartz in a never-ending and never-fruitful search for the gold which was supposed to lie hidden in the Teniquota mountains, the Englishman, gay and teasing, grave and tender, would make Andrina talk to him in English. He was, at these times, a bewildering yet endearing mixture to Andrina of the schoolmaster and the lover. Yet lover was a word that she had never dared to use in her thoughts of him, a name that she had never dared to give him. Of love, indeed, he never spoke, though to Andrina all his tender, teasing talk declared it. Once, grown timidly courageous, she had whispered:

"Tell me then—am I a little dear to Mijnheer?" And the young man, teasing her first with denial, had enchanted her with a grave and tender:

"You are very dear to me, and well you know it."

He spoke with absolute sincerity, but he said no more. And that behind his refusal to grant

her more than this there lay a deliberate determination to safeguard himself against any possible complications in the future, Andrina was too innocent and too generous to guess. His honesty, his sincerity drew quick response from her own honest and untutored heart, but the selfishness which might turn even honesty to its own purpose was unknown to her. Though he had tired so quickly of farming Andrina had not yet realized that the Englishman might tire just as quickly of schoolmastering—or of love. The boredom from which the natural gaiety of his temperament was for ever driving him to seek escape had never been experienced by her. She came of a race for whom time moved as slowly as did their wagons across the wide open spaces of the veld, and for whom thought moved as slowly as did time. In this slow movement there was for them no weariness of body and mind as the Englishman knew it. That craving for mental excitement and change of environment which fashioned the Englishman's outlook on life and which, when gratified, lapsed so quickly into boredom, played no part in theirs. Their slow habit of mind was not to seek adventure and rebel against the weariness which followed its achievement, but to accept both adventure and weariness with equal philosophy. This was life as God had ordained it and by what means could one hope to

escape the ordinances of God? Certainly by none that were known to Andrina.

V

THE easy good-nature with which the Englishman had accepted his change of rôle from pupil-farmer to schoolmaster had not deceived Tan' Linda. The Englishman, she knew, was more deeply gratified by this change than any but herself could guess. Things were going well with the young man and Andrina now, she thought, and she liked things to go well. She also liked them to go quickly. To her impetuous nature a slow courtship was a waste of precious time. And as one could never be sure of time in this world, why should one waste it? If it were right and reasonable that a young couple should fall in love, it was right and reasonable that they should marry. And if it were right and reasonable that they should marry, the sooner they married and settled down to the rearing of a family the better. And in the case of Andrina and the Englishman Tan' Linda could now see nothing but what was right and reasonable.

As she went about her work, her busy, kindly, romantic heart carried her thoughts continually now here and now there in Andrina's behalf. She

must, she thought, as soon as possible explain to the young man that Andrina's pedigree was as good as his own, and that the pastor Steenkamp from whom she was descended was a man whose name was mentioned in the history books of the colony. His name did, in fact, appear in the list of settlers under the Dutch East India Company, and thus far she was justified in her claims for him. But prudence forbade her mentioning his fame in the presence of the rest of the household, who had certainly never as yet heard of it and might even embarrass her by questioning it. And Tan' Linda wanted no questions. Swift and smooth sailing was what her ardent nature longed for.

It was in the post-office that, one morning, when Andrina was busy in the kitchen with Mevrouw, opportunity came to Tan' Linda. She had questioned the young man as to his pupils' progress and it was on Andrina's intelligence, so surprising when one remembered her shyness, her people, and her surroundings, that the Englishman dwelt. Tan' Linda was enchanted by his praise. But why, she asked, should Mijnheer be surprised at Andrina's intelligence? Was she not the descendant of the famous pastor Steenkamp about whom one might read to this day in the history books of the colony?

The Englishman had to admit that he knew nothing of the history of the colony and had never in his life before heard of the famous pastor Steenkamp.

"What was he famous for, that old johnnie?" he asked carelessly, lighting his pipe.

"Johnnie!" cried Tan' Linda. "Johnnie? Would you call a pastor so if you had one in your family?"

"There are several in my family," admitted the young man, tossing his match out through the open half-door into the yard. "Some of them johnnies. Some of them ninnies."

"Ninnies!" cried Tan' Linda. "Ninnies?" She was aghast. She did not know what a ninny was, but recognized in the word a term of contempt and that the young man should use a term of contempt in speaking of the pastors in his family was a serious blow to her. All her life she had looked up to the pastors of her church as beings superior to herself, and it had been solely to impress the Englishman with the importance of Andrina's family that she had made the schoolmaster Steenkamp a pastor. And the young man, puffing away at his pipe, refused to be impressed. Was her labour then to be wasted? The thought alarmed her. It was the Englishman himself who, unwittingly, brought back her self-confidence.

"They're not so bad," he conceded, "when they stick to schoolmastering."

"Schoolmastering!" cried Tan' Linda astounded. To put schoolmasters above pastors was indeed amazing to her, but her nimble mind was quick to take advantage of the young man's strange preference. "It was as a schoolmaster that the pastor Steenkamp was famous," she said. "It is as a schoolmaster that his name comes into the history-books of the colony."

"Oh, is it?" said the young man, puffing contentedly. "I must ask Andrina about the old buffer some day. We might perhaps make conversation about him."

This was not quite what Tan' Linda wanted. The greatness of the Steenkamp family was not a subject upon which Andrina, with all her inherited intelligence, could be expected to shine. Again her mind became active.

"I would not ask Andrina too much about the pastor Steenkamp," she said earnestly. "They are proud, the Steenkamps, as you can see for yourself by her aunt Johanna. It isn't easy for them to speak of the pastor when they are now so poor. But, believe me, Mijnheer, there are many of our people as poor as the Steenkamps to-day who were great in the days before the English took our land from us and may yet be great again. And one has but to look at Andrina,

and to hear her speak, to know that she comes of one of our good families. Does not Mijnheer find it so?"

"I haven't thought much about her family," said the young man good-humouredly. "But it would be a pity to annoy her people—especially the poor and proud Johanna. I won't mention the pastor in their family if you think I had better not. I'll avoid him as carefully as I avoid the pastors in my own. Andrina and I must make conversation about something else. If we fail to find a suitable subject to talk about, I'll come to you. But," he added, smiling enigmatically as he took his departure, "I don't think we'll fail."

With this, as the young man gave her no time for reply, Tan' Linda had to be content. She was not at all sure that, in the queer way of the English, he was not secretly laughing at her, but laughter had never yet hurt her, and she was convinced that the pastor Steenkamp, that strange darling of her imagination, must eventually bear some weight in Andrina's favour. Into none of her remarks, she was sure, had there come any hint of archness or any sign to show that she knew that the young man's interest in his pupil was not limited to her intelligence. The more she pondered over it, indeed, the more pleased she became with the part she had taken in their conversation. Things had been going well before,

she thought contentedly, but surely now, with the pastor "safely in the wagon," they would go better.

She smiled, glanced up at the sound of passing steps, and saw Aalst Vlokman crossing the yard. Strange, she thought, how often the beadle came up about the place! And looking always like a thunder-cloud. Yes, like a thunder-cloud. That was perhaps because Jan Beyers had not married Andrina. But wait a little, Aalst Vlokman, sang her gay young heart, wait a little and we shall yet hear what the Englishman thinks of your two plough-oxen!

VI

THE day at Harmonie began with early morning coffee, served throughout the house at six o'clock or earlier, and it was one of Andrina's duties now to superintend the coffee-making. In the pantry, on the long yellow-wood dresser, with its canister-laden shelves, the big thick, white, rose-decked cups were ranged over-night, and into each cup, according to long-standing custom, was placed its due supply of sugar. In the morning, while Classina October lighted the fire and boiled the kettle, Andrina, to whom the keys had been entrusted by Mevrouw, unlocked the pantry door, unlocked the coffee-

canister and "gave out" the coffee for the coffee-urn and cut and buttered as many slices of dark brown bread, almost black, as would be needed. Sometimes it was Classina who carried round the cups to the various bedrooms after Andrina had poured out the coffee in the kitchen. More often it was Andrina herself, doing quickly and quietly and without premeditation what was to be done, while Classina, lazy and good-natured, contentedly dawdled.

To Andrina no moments throughout the entire day were so precious and so marvellous as those which, thanks to the indolence of Classina, sometimes bore her thus to the Englishman with his early coffee. The sharp clearness of the exhilarating morning air: the swiftly changing pinks and purples and greys of the mountain rocks against the rising sun: the rich scents of the earth, the bushes in the veld, the flowers in Mevrouw's garden, the poplars in the grove: the calls and cries of men and beasts gathering to their daily labour in the slowly awakening world—of all this, as she ran out to the Englishman's room, she was vividly aware—to all this her soul made answer in a song of thanksgiving for which she had no words. Always she had been conscious of the amazing beauty of the sunrise in the Aangenaam valley, but never had she realized it with such intensity as now, when her

heart was filled, not with the sweet, vague sadness of youth, but with the tender and ageless triumph of love. The glory of the awakening world was but part of the glory of her own awakened heart.

Though various keys had to be used before Andrina could make the Englishman a cup of coffee, no key was needed for the outside room, which was never locked. Andrina, having tapped and waited for the Englishman's "Kom binna" (one of his few successful Dutch phrases), was free to enter. If no "Kom binna" answered her tap, she slipped quietly into the room and, putting the coffee down on a stool by the side of his bed, left it there for the young man to find on awaking. To find him asleep robbed her of much that made those stolen moments of first greeting dear to her, but she hesitated always to rouse him. Sleep, she thought, was good for him as an invalid, and in sleep he was to her another Jantje—innocent, helpless, a little child shielded by herself alone from the dangers of a threatening world. Her love became then not a hunger for his caresses, but an infinite and courageous tenderness.

It was to this strangely selfless passion of tenderness that, on the morning following Tan' Linda's talk with the Englishman, she yielded. Kneeling down by his side she drew her dear Arry, her dear, dear love towards her. The young man stirred, opened his eyes and closed them

again, smiled and lay still. Then, with the clumsy, fumbling movements of a child still heavy in sleep, his hand went up to the fastenings of the bodice which hid her cool, smooth, round breasts. And she who had been ashamed of her breasts before Tan' Johanna when she dressed for the Sacrament, yielded to this dear and sleepy child the cool shelter of her bosom . . .

Many times throughout the day which followed Andrina blushed for her temerity, but never once did she regret it. Its full significance perhaps escaped her. She had seen in the Englishman only the beloved, sleeping child, and felt in herself only an overwhelming compassion drawing her towards him. But for the Englishman the episode had had a deeper import and he too did not regret it. The shy ardour with which his pupil had followed his guidance in the art of living or of loving as he understood it had from the first surprised and delighted him. With the natural selfishness of his disposition, strengthened by the selfishness of semi-invalidism behind which it was so easy to seek moral shelter, he had refused to think seriously of the future or to take any responsibility for it. The present—with its right to that complete freedom of action which he had exercised in coming to Harmonie and which he would not hesitate to exercise again, when need arose, to take him from it—alone was his. And

in the present, with Andrina's gentle acquiescence, he would take his pleasure.

Thus it was that, never yet having found himself in a situation which gaiety and good-humour had not enabled him to control, and refusing to admit that in his relations with Andrina the limits of gaiety and good-humour had already been passed, the young man had accepted the march of events without misgiving. But lately there had been moments, guard against them as he would, which had brought him unexpected twinges of conscience, and from such a twinge he had suffered, unreasonably as it had seemed to himself, on the previous day during Tan' Linda's talk of the famous pastor. And at this stage of his adventure he wanted no twinges of conscience, no hampering sense of responsibility towards Andrina or her family to mar his pleasure in his pupil's progress. He wished to be assured not of Andrina's antecedents, but of her freedom from the trammels of family influence. He wished to be assured not of the gentleness of her birth, but of her courage, not of her innocence, but of her understanding. He wished to be assured that, child though she was, she was yet woman enough to know what she was doing.

In all this the young man was not entirely selfish. Though selfishness prompted many of his actions and was perhaps the ruling guide of

his life, he was fundamentally honest and he wished to be honest with his pupil. The girl must suffer no compulsion from him. Her gifts to him must be as free as were his own gifts to her. Only as the gifts of a woman who understood what she was doing could he, in justice not only to himself but to her, accept them. And it was easier now to believe not only in her understanding but her courage. The future would bring him no reproaches. It had been a woman, not a child, who had drawn him to her.

VII

In the Aangenaam valley visits from the distant Platkops doctor were almost as rare as were the visits of the pastor, and children were born into the world, and men, women and children left it, in such physical and spiritual comfort as could be administered to them by those around them. On the bigger farms every housewife had her own supply of home-made "drops" and simples, not only for the use of her own household, but for the relief of any sick and poor who might appeal to her. And because burial in the valley must follow so hard upon the heels of death, she had in readiness also both her shroud and her coffin and the shroud and the coffin of her "man." The poor could make no such prep-

aration and here and there among them the older custom still lingered, and in petticoats or shirts, bound about with linen, their bodies went down into the earth into caves cut deep in their graves and boarded up with planks. For rich and poor alike the only bier was a ladder, and round about the farm of Harmonie, and for many miles beyond it, the dead were carried to their graves under the folds of a black cashmere shawl, heavily fringed, belonging to Mevrouw van der Merwe. Every farmhouse had its own group of plain whitewashed tombs, every poorer dwelling its humbler mounds of earth.

Of all the housewives in the valley none was so famous for her drops as was Alida van der Merwe. Though her flower-garden was a wilderness left to Tan' Linda's erratic enthusiasms, there was no plant or herb, no veld root or leaf or berry, whose virtues she did not know. The patience which Stephan van der Merwe exercised in the planting and harvesting of his lands his wife practised in the distilling of her drops and in the gathering of her medicinal roots and herbs from every source that was known to her. A small cupboard in the larder was given up to her liniments and oils, her dried orange and pomegranate skins, her little bags of roots and leaves. Her medicine chest, a small brown box with a leather strap, was kept in the corner cupboard in

the dining-room, ready for instant use. And many times throughout the year would Alida van der Merwe set off to a sick neighbour with the medicine chest and, because all men must die and none can foretell the time of their dying, take with her also the black cashmere shawl.

It was for a cure for a croupy child that there came to Harmonie one day, at the close of the midday rest, Justus Mostert, a bijwoner on the farm of Mijnheer de Jager, of Schoongesicht. Every remedy known to his wife Marta and to Mevrouw de Jager had been tried and tried in vain. He himself had killed a chicken and cut open its heart and placed the still-warm heart on the chest of the child, but, God knows how it was, this cure had brought no relief. His little Cornelia must surely die if Mevrouw van der Merwe could not help him. It was Mevrouw de Jager who had sent him to Mevrouw van der Merwe. And Mevrouw de Jager had said also that she would take it as a great kindness to herself if Mevrouw van der Merwe would come and see Marta's child. If Mevrouw would come and bring with her also Juffrouw de Neysen and little Jantje—this was what his own Mevrouw had wished. But there was no time to lose, for surely his little Cornelia was close to death.

Mevrouw might have hesitated about Jantje, but with Tan' Linda, who had been the first to

answer Justus's knock, there was no hesitation. In a flash, as Justus stated his errand, Tan' Linda had seen a means of furthering the affairs of Andrina and the Englishman. Jantje should come with her and Alida to Schoongesicht and the young man should have but a single pupil for his English class. . . . There had been, Tan' Linda thought, a slight change, unnoticed by any but herself, in the relationship of the young people. . . . This, she had no doubt, was due to the pastor Steenkamp. Yes, things were certainly moving. Left alone for an afternoon these two young people might come to a definite understanding. And they should be left alone. She and Jantje would go with Alida to Schoongesicht. Jantje was a great favourite with Engela de Jager and in the Schoongesicht garden it was always possible to acquire, by theft if necessary, new "slips."

While Mevrouw, after further questioning, went to her medicine cupboard in the larder, Tan' Linda ran out into the yard to give orders for the cart to be inspanned, and then called to Andrina to rouse and dress Jantje. Her enthusiasm was caught by that small boy, eager as always for adventure. The Englishman and the *First Reading Book* were thrown to the winds. Tan' Engela, with her endless supply of almond tommelaitjes, was the dearest of his friends . . .

It was in the yard, after Justus had ridden off

on his horse, that Mevrouw, Tan' Linda, little Jantje and April, the driver, climbed into the cart. Mijnheer and Frikkie had gone off together to visit distant lands and would not be back before nightfall. Andrina was thus to be in sole charge of the house. The keys of the larder and the post-office, said Mevrouw, smiling, were now hers. Everything, she knew, would be safe in Andrina's care. Only one thing troubled her. Her guest, the Englishman. In their haste they were leaving him without explanation or apology. Andrina must make their excuses. She must see that he had his afternoon coffee, and she must get him the little red cakes that he always liked with it. She must do her best for him . . . Justus Mostert's child was surely very bad and she was taking with her the black cashmere shawl. But it might be the will of the Lord that a pack of the dried "sweat-leaf" sprinkled with brandy might yet save her. Yes, she would give the child a pack—spread the leaves out on a blanket, sprinkle them with "dop" and wrap the child tightly into this pack to sweat. The leaves were in a little bag on top of the medicine chest on her lap. The black shawl, rolled up in white linen, was in the box of the cart seat. She smiled down upon Andrina, gave the word to April, and in a moment the cart was out of the yard.

VIII

DOWN in his lands Aalst Vlokman the beadle was taking his midday rest under a willow close by the river. He did not lie stretched out on the ground, face downwards on his arms, as was the way among the workers in the valley, but sat up against the tree-trunk, gazing gloomily ahead of him. His mind was working as always from the past to the future, from remorse to anxiety, from Klaartje to Andrina. Of the present he was hardly conscious. Justus Mostert, riding by on his little trotting horse, had made no impression upon him. The devil himself riding by on a horse would have found him indifferent.

The storm which on Sacrament Sunday had ended so strangely in triumph for Johanna had left the beadle a greater prey than ever to his fears. Into everything that concerned Klaartje's child he now read nothing but disaster. That simple series of events which proved to Andrina the love and care of her Heavenly Father proved to the beadle only His desertion. Step by step, it seemed to him, God had allowed, and was still allowing, the road to be cleared for Andrina to take her way to perdition. And those who loved her most were most active in helping her on her way. Johanna had not only encouraged the girl in that love of finery which had been her mother's

undoing, but had dared him to counter it. Jacoba, poor fool, might God forgive her! had given the child a mirror in which to learn her beauty. Mevrouw had taken her up to the homestead, when the Englishman's presence there made it but another coffee-house as dangerous to the girl as the coffee-house in Platkops dorp had proved to her mother. They were mad, all of them—Johanna in her strength of righteousness: Jacoba in her weakness: Mevrouw in that calm serenity which suspected no evil in those around her. And he too, perhaps, was mad. Yes, he too was mad . . . mad to stay on here in the Aangenaam valley where God had refused his sacrifice and where life was now become, under the lash of Johanna's tongue, a daily torture of remorse and anxiety.

He thought again, as he had thought frequently of late, of the one way of escape that seemed possible to him—a return to the Kalahari desert. But in the very moment that he began to brood on this, there came to him suddenly, clearly, the memory of Klaartje running to join him in the wagon and stooping low as she ran, as if seeking protection from the earth itself for her flight. It was in that moment, it seemed to him now, that his love had first leapt into the flame that so quickly consumed him. And Klaartje had never loved him. Klaartje had laughed at his love as,

in the coffee-house, she had learned to laugh at most things in life. Only Herman du Toit—young, handsome, evil—had had her tears.

Was it in love, or in terror, or in despair that she had married Herman? He would never know. Whatever secrets old Tan' Truitje had revealed to Johanna after Klaartje's death Johanna in turn had revealed to none. But there was one which needed no revelation to Aalst Vlokman—one which, indeed, thirteen years ago he had threatened to expose if Johanna did not consent to accept him as her lodger when Mijnheer van der Merwe made him bijwoner of his lands. For thirteen years that threat, never repeated, had made him master of the little mud-walled house. And now?

Now, in the moment of increasing danger to Klaartje's child, the spell of that threat had been broken. How? He could not say how. The complete and tremendous change in Johanna had not astounded him, for he was by nature almost incapable of experiencing astonishment. But the cause of the change was a mystery to him, and on this he brooded. He had never liked Johanna. It was to Johanna that the tragedy of Klaartje's life, of Jacoba's, was due. The part he had played himself had been dependent on hers. Righteousness with Johanna had proved a terrible weapon for evil. If Johanna had but sinned a little she

would have been a better woman. Yes, God forgive him, but he, the beadle of Harmonie church, believed that Johanna would have been a better woman had she sinned. But Johanna had never sinned. Thus she was damned. Yet it was from sin that he wished now to save Andrina! Was he God, then, or the devil that he should wish Johanna for her good to fall into sin while striving for her good to save Andrina from it? There was no reason in his thoughts. They led him nowhere. They ran through his mind like snakes through the grass—as mysterious in their coming as in their going. And life was like that. A slipping out of darkness into light and out of light into darkness again . . .

His thoughts scarcely touched Jacoba. Between him and Jacoba there lay as always the barrier of the evil he had wrought her and her forgiveness of it. The woman behind this barrier was a being apart—a child, a saint, timid as a mouse, gentle as a dove, incapable of any strong action, incapable of arousing, perhaps, any strong feeling. If Johanna in her righteousness were the avenger of the past, Jacoba in her gentle pity would long ago have turned its shadow to a consoling shade. But Aalst Vlokman had never sought that shade. How should he seek it now?

Again, remembering the sharpness of Johanna's bitter tongue, his thoughts turned to

flight from the valley. And again he brushed those thoughts aside. He could not leave the valley. The square white church, the lands, the little mud-walled house, the mountains towering up to the clear blue sky, the very sounds, so sharp and so familiar, of the life around him, the very smell of the earth as he dug into it with his spade—these held him fast. God had refused his sacrifice, yet he clung still to his right of service in the house of God. Johanna and Jacoba had become strange to him, yet there was no man or woman in all the world who was not stranger to him than they. There was no house in all the world that offered him even such a poor welcome as was his in the mud-walled one built by old Piet Steenkamp for his daughters. And in no part of the world could he hope to escape those ties which bound him, in his love, to Klaartje's Andrina. Go where he might, back to the valley the child would draw him as thirteen years ago the casual mention of her name had drawn him from the Kalahari desert. However openly he might ignore her—and he had never since Sacrament Sunday mentioned her name to either of the sisters—he could not tear her from his heart, he could not leave her to her fate.

Brooding still, he heard the rumble of wheels down in the drift by the Jew-woman's store. He did not heed it. Unnoticed, the Harmonie cart—

strange vehicle of Andrina's fate, with Tan' Linda for its goddess—passed through the drift and took the road to Schoongesicht.

IX

Up at the homestead, Andrina, left alone in the yard, went slowly back into the house to make fresh coffee for the Englishman. She was troubled and happy, happy and troubled. The native servants had gone to their huts, as was their custom, and silence hung about the quiet, half-darkened rooms like a drapery. She went into the larder to get the little red cakes which the Englishman loved. They were kept in a deep, brown canister which she had to unlock. She spent some time in choosing the lightest, the crispest of these. To do so gave her a strange, almost physical pleasure. It gave her the same pleasure to wash again the spotless cup and saucer which he would use for his coffee. He would never know with what care she had chosen his cakes, with what care she had polished his cup and saucer, yet this service brought her so exquisite a joy that her heart cried out in thankfulness to heaven for it. There was so little she could do for her dear love, and not anything that she would not do! Alone in that quiet, darkened house her heart cried out for service to him as

it had never cried before, her body trembled at the thought of his caresses, her soul sang its innocent magnificat of humility and desire . . .

She put the cakes and the coffee on to a small bright tin tray once purchased from the Jew-woman as a present from Jantje to his grandmother, and went out to the Englishman's room. The young man was lying on his bed, reading by the light from the window overlooking the garden. The window on to the pathway was shuttered and the greater part of the room, when she closed the half-door, was in semi-darkness.

The young man put down his paper. "Why, Andrina!" he cried. "Coffee! Here?"

"Mijnheer," answered Andrina, "Mevrouw and Juffrouw de Neysen and Jantje all have gone to the farm of Schoongesicht where Justus Mostert's Cornelia lies sick of the croup. I alone am left in the house. Mevrouw asked that Mijnheer would excuse her, but Justus's child is surely very sick. And I have brought Mijnheer his coffee to him."

"And you?" questioned the Englishman, as she put the tray down on the stool by the side of his bed. "What about you? Have you had your coffee yet?"

"No, Mijnheer," answered Andrina, who had not until that moment remembered it.

"Then sit down. No, here! On the bed." He

drew her down beside him, kissed her gently, fiercely, then gently again, and sitting up suddenly, took up the cup of coffee. "We'll share this," he said. "Drink!"

"Mijnheer," whispered Andrina in protest, withdrawing, "it is for Mijnheer, not for me."

"Well, Mijnheer will drink none of it until you have had some. And he wants it. How long will you keep him waiting?"

Andrina, with unreasonable tears gathering under her lashes, bent down her head and drank from the cup which he held up to her and which she had but a few moments before polished with such care for his own particular use.

When she raised her head, it was to find the young man smiling at her curiously. "Don't hold them back, Andrina," he said. "They're rather beautiful. Diamonds round as pearls. Let them run. I've never seen them run. And it's rather miserly of you, don't you think, to hold them back?"

Bewildered by his banter, Andrina, to whom the sharing of his coffee had been as strangely moving as the sharing of a sacrament, needed no second bidding. Suddenly, astoundingly as it seemed to herself, her body was shaken by her sobs. She heard the clatter of the coffee cup on the stool and felt the Englishman's arms around

her, his kisses on her hair, her neck, her ears. Gently he tilted back her head and kissed away her tears. Whom was it that he held now against his breast—Andrina the woman or Andrina the child? He could not say. In the stress of his own emotion, his desire, the question became an impertinence.

"Dear child! Dear child! What makes you cry like this? I haven't made you really unhappy, have I? Have I?"

"No! No!" cried Andrina in quick compunction for any distress she might have caused him. "Mijnheer must never think it! It is joy that he brings me. He knows it! He knows it!" She paused, troubled by some memory of Tan' Jacoba, some thought, some fear which disturbed while it eluded her. Like a child trying to spell out a lesson she whispered:

"It is as if—as if—joy brings also a pain in the heart. . . ."

"So it does," smiled the Englishman, "so it does. But the joy is worth it. Or don't you think so?"

Andrina did not answer, and the young man, insistent, grave, masterful, tilted up her face again and repeated:

"Don't you think so? Don't you think so, Andrina?"

"Mijnheer knows what I think. Why does he ask me?"

She lay quiet in his arms, listening to the steady beat of his heart. That it had quickened, and was quickening, she did not realize. To her it sounded as steady as the hammer of God on the anvil of time, and it brought her once again that sense of security in the Englishman's presence which was one of the simplest and one of the most precious miracles of her love. In the quietness of that half-darkened room, in the quietness which enveloped all the farm-place, she felt that she could listen to its rhythm for ever. And in this sweet content, this dear security, the urgency in the young man's voice at first escaped her.

"Ah, but does he know what you think," he was saying. "That's just it! That's just it! There are other joys he wants to share with you, but he doesn't know if you want them. He doesn't know if you would think them worth the pain they may bring to your heart. And he doesn't want to make you unhappy. He wants to make you happier than you've ever been before. He wants to bring your love to its fulfilment. And he thinks he could. He thinks he could. Shall he risk it, Andrina?"

"Fulfilment?" murmured Andrina. "Fulfilment?" She did not understand, nor did the young man stop to explain. Child? Woman?

As she lay in his arms she was both, she was neither. She was a gift of the gods. As such he would accept her. As such he would claim her.

"Andrina, Andrina!" he cried. "Andrina!"

His hand slipped from her neck to her shoulder, from her shoulder to the curve of her firm young breast. Quickly, as he kissed her, pressing his lips deep into hers he undid the buttons of her bodice and pulled down the chemise. . . . Andrina trembled. This was no sleepy child seeking the shelter of her bosom. This was no sleepy Arry in need of her protection. It was not compassion that he aroused in her now. It was not tenderness. With the strange, disturbing, physical response of her quivering body to these passionate caresses there went an exultant, overwhelming, primitive desire to minister to his needs. And in the thought of service to him there was for her now no absolute cleavage between the joy of her body and the joy of her soul. Together they made for her, in the outpouring of her love, in the humility of her spirit, in the innocence of her mind, a glory that had no shame.

"What is it that Mijnheer would have of me?" she whispered. "I am his."

. . . The beadle had been right, perhaps, and Klaartje's Andrina, to her peril, possessed no saving sense of sin.

X

Justus Mostert's Cornelia did not die. The pack of "sweat-leaf" eased the breathing of the small, tortured child and it was with the black cashmere shawl still in the cart-box that Mevrouw returned to Harmonie with Tan' Linda and little Jantje. Jantje brought with him, secreted about his person, a horrible sticky mess of almond tommelaitjes. Suddenly, in the midst of his happiness at Tan' Engela's, his coming to Schoongesicht had struck him as desertion of his two friends Andrina and the Englishman. More than Tan' Engela, with all her tommelaitjes, the Englishman and Andrina were his friends. It was for them that, tucked away inside his shirt, where the heat of his little body quickly began to melt it, he was taking home the tommelaitjes. The rapid disappearance of the sweetmeat had caused some comment among his elders. It had flattered Tan' Engela. It had troubled Mevrouw. Tan' Linda had exclaimed at it with noisy admiration. But Jantje had kept his secret to himself. And every mile of the way back to Harmonie his secret was becoming a closer one.

For Tan' Linda the visit to Schoongesicht had been more than successful. Not only was she bringing home a small bundle of slips teased out of Engela de Jager with much talk and laughter

(Engela, though generous in the matter of tommelaitjes, did not part willingly with slips), but she was bringing home also a wife for Frikkie. This was Engela's niece Emerentia due in a week or two from the Caledon district on a visit to her aunt. Never had Tan' Linda been able to arouse in Frikkie even a momentary interest in any girl in the valley. He accepted them all with equal indifference. But the very fact that Emerentia was a total stranger to the valley was, Tan' Linda thought, in her favour. Frikkie would be compelled to notice a stranger just because she was a stranger. And mere curiosity, when once it was aroused, took men journeying into far countries both of the physical and of the mental worlds. Yes, she dared to think, as she sat on the back seat of the cart with the serene and gentle Alida, she dared to think that but for curiosity many men and most women would die bachelors and old maids. Even she, afflicted as she was, had suffered at times from the curiosity which in other human beings drove men and women to marriage. Could she but arouse this curiosity in Frikkie and make him for a little while forget his lands she could marry him, she thought, to Emerentia. Oh, she must manage it! And she would! Had she not just lately most successfully managed the affair of Jan Beyers and Betje Ferreira? Was she not at that very moment

most successfully managing the affair of Andrina and the Englishman? She dared not hope that on her return to Harmonie this evening she would be free to fling her bomb upon an astonished world, but surely the time for flinging it was drawing very near, very near! But the slow and cautious feelings of the Englishman must be respected and she would respect them.

In her pleasurable excitement, it was a little difficult for Tan' Linda to keep her thoughts to herself. Her nature was a generous one. God had ordained that in her affliction she should remain always an onlooker and that curiosity for her should never be gratified by personal adventure. But self-pity was unknown to her and interest in the affairs of others never failed her. It was not always, perhaps, a wise interest, but it was never a malicious one, never ungenerous. Almost every action of her life was prompted by it. And almost every action of her life betrayed the natural kindliness of her noisy, laughter-loving heart. With so much now to exercise that heart and so little scope for exercising her twisted body, she was glad when, towards dusk, the cart drove into the yard at Harmonie.

In the yard both Andrina and the Englishman awaited them. Mevrouw, leaning over her side of the cart, at which the young man stood, asked in gentle apology for her absence:

"Things have gone well with Mijnheer?"

"Excellently, Mevrouw! My coffee for some reason never tasted better and my pupil's progress was everything that could be desired. She's a particularly good pupil, Mevrouw. Or else, perhaps, I'm a particularly good master."

"It is no doubt," said Mevrouw smiling, "a little of both. And no doubt also all that Mijnheer teaches her is good. Take care then, Jantje."

Jantje, clutching strangely at his stomach, down which there was now trickling a sticky mess of molasses, jumped out of the cart into Andrina's arms.

"Drintje," he whispered eagerly, "look now! I have brought sweet-stuff for you and for the Englishman also. Presently I will give it you. Wait but a little."

"What then, Jantje," cried Tan' Linda. "Is it a secret that you have? Or is it," she added slyly, out of the Englishman's hearing and handing Andrina her slips, "or is it Andrina that has the secret?"

Andrina blushed. In the half-dusk, which gave her beauty a softer radiance, she raised her eyes to Tan' Linda in a mute appeal that touched the older woman's impulsive heart. No, thought Tan' Linda, as she climbed awkwardly and painfully out of the cart, no, Andrina must not be teased. She was too easily frightened. She was not ready

yet for her secret to be given to the world. Well then, let her keep it a little longer. It was worth keeping. One had but to look at her face to know that the afternoon had brought her happiness. And surely this same afternoon would presently bring Frikkie happiness too. Yes, perhaps after all it would be well not to be too much hurried in the affair of Andrina and the Englishman. She would nurse her bomb a little longer. The engagement of one couple frequently led, in a sort of pleasant crisis, to the engagement of a second. She would postpone the crisis for Andrina and the Englishman until Emerentia was safely arrived at Schoongesicht. Things might then end, if properly managed, in a double wedding at Harmonie!

She limped cheerfully into the kitchen for her long knife and then set off to plant, at random in the fading light, her slips from the Schoongesicht garden.

"If Mijnheer pleases," she called gaily, "he can come with me and carry water."

The Englishman followed her. Andrina carried the medicine-chest and the black cashmere shawl into the house for Mevrouw. Mevrouw spoke with hopeful sympathy of the little Cornelia, describing minutely the process of the pack and its effect upon the child. She went into the bedroom,

which for forty years she had shared with her husband Stephan, and opened a small, brass-bound ebony chest. In this chest were her grave-clothes and the grave-clothes of the man by whose side she would some day lie in the earth as night after night she lay in the great wooden bed which for forty years they had shared. She smoothed out the shawl on top of the grave-clothes, sighing gently. As she closed the chest, she caught sight of Jantje clutching still at his stomach.

"My little one," she cried, drawing the boy towards her, "have you then a pain? So it will always be with little children who eat too many tommelaitjes. And too fast."

To rub his pain she undid his jacket and pulled up his shirt.

"Andrintje," she cried faintly, "Andrintje!"

Andrina ran forward. Across Jantje's chest and trickling down his stomach was the last of Tan' Engela's tommelaitjes. It had been spread thin, on a piece of paper, as was Tan' Engela's custom, and looked now like a liquid brown plaster. Very gingerly Andrina took hold of two ends of the paper and drew the mass of stickiness away from Jantje's skin.

"But, Jantje," she cried, holding the astonishing mess in her hands, "but, Jantje, what then . . ."

"For you," cried Jantje, flinging himself upon her, "for you and the Englishman I brought it. Are you not then both of you my friends?"

XI

As quietly as night slips into day and day into night, Andrina slipped into a life of dear and secret intimacy with the Englishman. It was for this—to love the Englishman and to serve him with her body as she served others with her hands—that she had been created. It was for this that she now lived. Sin? She never thought of sin. It was to God, the Heavenly Father, that she owed this rapture and to God, day and night, she gave thanks for it. The Devil was never to get his due from the innocent, trusting heart of Klaartje's Andrina.

Her happiness was like a flowering which, though unnoticed by most, was full of significance to those who watched it as Tan' Linda, Tan' Coba and the beadle watched it. In the Englishman it aroused the triumph of a creator. It was he who had called this new Andrina into being. This miracle was of his working and though he would take no responsibility for the future consequences of his act its present consequences made him exultant. But his exultation was secret. In everything he did he exercised a discretion which would

have driven Tan' Linda to exasperation if it had not compelled her to admiration, and if she had not been for the moment content to let things move slowly, pending the expected but delayed arrival of Mevrouw de Jager's niece Emerentia. Occasionally she permitted herself to indulge in a slight, very slight, hint of raillery. The young man smiled, looked wise, but was never caught. Tan' Linda, he thought, was a knowing old bird. But she should not pipe for him. He would dance to his own tuning. And Andrina should dance with him. Whatever might come of it this exercise as mere experience would be good for Andrina. And he held it to be a man's chief duty in life to make the most of any experience that came his way.

This theory he expounded one day to his pupil, and was delighted, and allowed his conscience to be gently soothed, by the way in which she accepted it. But Andrina's acceptance was not deliberate and mental. It was instinctive and spiritual. Experience, as she understood it, was no more to be courted than it was to be shirked. It meant for her, as it meant for her race, something ordained by the will of the Lord, and by no means within the power of man was it possible to escape the will of the Lord. Her acceptance was thus not a matter of mental courage as the young man was pleased to imagine, but a

matter of faith. While the Englishman prided himself upon being a free agent Andrina knew herself to be entirely in the hands of her God.

Of her God she spoke sometimes, shyly, to the young man when he questioned her. And again in the direct simplicity of her replies she seemed to him courageous. What had seemed to the beadle in the Bible-class so perilous a lack of the sense of sin seemed to the Englishman a sort of moral fearlessness. It was from the Old Testament that she drew her religion. But the jealous and vindictive God of that Testament she could not accept. Her God was a God of pity and the Heavenly Father who had brought Mijnheer back to Harmonie. She admitted with sorrow her inability to appreciate the divinity of Christ. To think of him as God made him meaningless to her, she said. And in a flash, as she spoke, the crowning tragedy of the Jewish teacher's life became for the Englishman a Godhead thrust upon him by his followers.

With little religious feeling of his own, the young man found himself strangely moved by the intensity of Andrina's. Yet intensity, he thought, was perhaps not the word. He remembered vaguely a phrase of Thoreau's about telegraph poles "a-soaking and a-seasoning in music." Andrina, it seemed to him, had absorbed the religion of her race, which was also its literature

and its single form of art, much as the telegraph poles had absorbed the humming of the winds, to give it out again in a gentler music of her own. Was she in the same way, he wondered, "a-soaking and a-seasoning" in the joy of his caresses? He could not say. Simple as she was she remained a mystery to him. However comfortably he might arrange his conscience about her she was still mysterious. Within her narrow limitations there were depths which he would never plumb. Even in her appreciation of the beauty of the Book of Job, he felt that she had outstripped him. And never had he known a woman so gentle and yet so fearless in her acquiescence to his bodily pleasure. Never had he known one whose natural simplicity of heart came so near to wisdom and to beauty and to goodness.

It was to her simplicity, perhaps, that Andrina owed the safekeeping of her secret through the following weeks. Her relations with the Englishman were never guessed even by Tan' Linda. By some miracle she still escaped that selfishness by which love is most quickly betrayed. Tan' Linda in the post-office, Mevrouw in the kitchen, Jantje in his bedroom suffered no neglect. She was to them all what she had always been with but a deeper tenderness, and to Jacoba she was something more. Down in the little mud house, where Johanna feasted upon vengeance and the

beadle nursed and nourished his forebodings, Jacoba's fears were lulled to rest by the radiance of her darling's joy. Perhaps, perhaps, thought Jacoba, her prayers had been heard and Andrina was to escape the sorrow that had once been hers.

Thus it was that the days slipped quietly by in secret joy for Andrina and anticipation for Tan' Linda, in secret hope for Tan' Coba and fears for the beadle, and in a content of mind for the Englishman which drifted imperceptibly but inevitably into that boredom from which he was ever seeking to escape. The end came suddenly, not with the hurling of Tan' Linda's bomb but with the arrival of a short note in the Englishman's mail on that long, hot, still and pleasant day which brought Emerentia Viljoen on her first visit to Harmonie.

Emerentia Viljoen, the niece of Engela de Jager, was a revelation to the Englishman and a revelation to Frikkie. The impression she made upon Frikkie was all that Tan' Linda could have wished. The impression she made upon the Englishman was caused partly by the contrast she offered to Andrina and partly by the memories she awakened of a life that had nothing in common either with that of Harmonie or with that of Princestown, but to which he now knew, suddenly and emphatically, that he himself belonged. Emerentia was small, dark, lively as a cricket.

gay as a bird, and friendly to all the world. She had spent several years at a boarding-school near Cape Town and spoke excellent English. Her flow of language, indeed, in both English and Dutch, was astounding and never ceased. Her manners were charming. And before she had been ten minutes in the house it was as if she had been there all her life and meant to remain there for the rest of it.

The Englishman's acquaintance with Dutch girls had been limited by circumstances, Frikkie's by wilfulness. Yet Emerentia, so surprising to both of them, was like many of the younger generation of her race. Beneath her gaiety and chatter there lay a solid foundation of common sense and capability. She was not likely to lose her small, charming head either in love or in any other emergency. She would make a good wife and a good mother. And, what was more to Tan' Linda's immediate satisfaction, on this first visit to Harmonie she not only compelled Frikkie to pay her attention, but, once having gained his attention, she held it. Frikkie's affair, thought Tan' Linda, could not have begun better. With such a beginning the double wedding at Harmonie would soon be upon them. The time had come at last for her to play a little upon the feelings of the Englishman.

As Emerentia drove out of the yard with her

aunt, chattering to the last and begging them all to come visiting her at Schoongesicht, Tan' Linda turned to the Englishman. The young man was smiling, amused and tolerant.

"A good wife for Frikkie, don't you think, Mijnheer?" whispered Tan' Linda.

"Excellent."

"And what about you? Is there no young girl in our valley that will make Mijnheer as good a wife as Emerentia will make Frikkie?"

"I'm a bachelor by nature, Juffrouw."

"So, Mijnheer, are all men till they take them wives. A man does not come married into the world!"

"No, but some men choose to go unmarried out of it."

"A bad choice, Mijnheer! Surely you will not make it?"

"Perhaps not, Juffrouw," smiled the young man. "Perhaps not. Who can tell?"

He moved as he spoke towards the post-office, where Andrina was busy sorting the mail. With his sister Elinor's weekly budget she handed him a small note. He took it from her with a quick movement of surprise. Standing in the doorway he read it, thrust it into his pocket, only to withdraw and reread it, then turned and, gathering up the rest of his mail, walked quickly out into

the yard and down the gable path to his outside room.

XII

ONCE in his own room the Englishman closed his door by placing a stool against it and, sitting down near the garden window, glanced through the rest of his mail. His sister Elinor's letter was dated simply "Sunday." Nothing, he thought, would ever teach Elinor to date her letters properly. Carelessness about dates was one of those many bad habits which first he and then her husband Johnnie had tried for years to cure. But Elinor was incurable. Easy-going, humorous, tolerant, she sailed through life with all her inconsistencies pleasantly softened by a good nature that came near to indolence. Her letters were always amusing and often shrewd. She was not free from malice, but malice with her was never divorced from humour. It was, however, neither her malice nor her humour which held his interest now, but the news which she gave him in her closing sentences.

"Lettice is with us. Descended upon us suddenly to escape, she said, the attentions of Tony Thorneycroft. Also, I think, to gain news of you. I reassured her about your health. Told her, in fact, that according to our cousin Emily

there was nothing now wrong with your health but the curse of idleness and a too comfortable income, both of which afflictions marriage would cure She seemed impressed by Emily's wisdom, but whether this means that she intends to complete your cure by spending your income rather than Tony Thorneycroft's, it is beyond me to say. Lettice is still Lettice."

That Lettice was still Lettice, the little note which he had read in the post-office and which he now read again was proof.

"Dear Harry," it ran, "I take back everything I said under the apple-tree. You said that I might, and I do. Lettice."

That was Lettice. Impulsive, quick, direct, and capable of changing the entire course of her life, and his own, by breaking a year's silence with a note of two sentences.

With his mind still held by those memories which Emerentia's gay and charming self-confidence had awakened, the Englishman had found himself deeply and strangely moved by this note from Lettice Featherstone. There had, in those first moments in the post-office, been something fine in the emotion which had so surprisingly swept through him. He was still moved, but his emotion now was more selfish and more excited and exciting. Life, he thought triumphantly, would always be adventure with Lettice Feather-

stone, and it would be adventure capably carried out. Like Emerentia—and how strangely Emerentia had reminded him of her!—Lettice never lost her head, even in wilfulness, and because her mind worked with amazing rapidity and fearlessness she was never boring. She was, in fact, like a bird darting from branch to branch, from tree to tree, in absolute and gay assurance. She belonged by birth to his own and Elinor's world —the world which sent out judges and administrators to its colonies, and soldiers and sailors to the borders of its empire. But, unlike the indolent Elinor, she made frequent excursions to other planes, from which she returned enriched by varied experience. Tony Thorneycroft, spoken of vaguely as a poet, was the harvest she had reaped from Chelsea.

It was because of Tony that, under the appletree, Lettice, during his convalescence, had refused to marry him. Half banteringly, with the lightly assumed, petulant self-pity of an invalid, he had insisted that if within a year she changed her mind she should tell him so. He had hardly expected her to change her mind and, though to tease her he had played with the idea that it was her refusal to marry him which was retarding his convalescence, he had certainly not meant to grieve if she did not. It was the slowness of this convalescence, after an illness slightly affect-

ing his chest, which had sent him out to Africa. At Princestown—and it was strange now to remember how little he had thought of Lettice at Princestown!—he had done his best to amuse himself in mild flirtation with his cousin Emily's daughters. But the pokerish Henrietta and the silent Jane had not been reared for dalliance and in something like exasperation he had fled from Princestown to Harmonie. At Harmonie, where Lettice was now suddenly revealed to him as the woman to whom all his life he had been journeying, he had thought of her even less than he had done at Princestown. For here he had found Andrina.

It was of Andrina that he thought, with a reluctant tenderness, as he folded up his letters. He had forgotten Andrina. Andrina. Strange child! Strange woman! Would she take it hard?

He got up from his seat by the window, searched for a pipe on the table and began cleaning the bowl with his pocket-knife. His movements were slow and deliberate, and slow and deliberate did he mean to keep his thoughts. The time had come for him to exercise once again his right to complete freedom of action and he must exercise it. He must leave Harmonie. He must leave Africa. And the sooner the better. Old stick-in-the-mud at Princestown would give him a clean bill of health for his chest. No fear about

that. (Damn it, what a foul thing this pipe was!) And from Princestown he would cable to Lettice. Yes, better cable, or she might be off into some other world and meet him on arrival with some other Tony. He smiled grimly as he thought of Tony. With the thought of Tony the sense of victory, of possession, grew upon him. After all, from a distance of over six thousand miles, he had beaten the Chelsea poet. Lettice had come back to her own world for her husband. He was going back to his own world for his wife. Lettice, being Lettice, would even as his wife make bird-like darts and excursions into other worlds, but she should reap no more Tonies. He would see to that. He smiled again. . . .

Slowly, as he filled his pipe, his thoughts came back to Andrina. Yes, he must admit it now, Andrina had begun, just a little, to bore him. Yet until to-day he had not been conscious of it. . . . Would she take it hard? He thought not, yet knew that he thought not only because he wished to think not. Her gentle abandonment had not been the "easy come, easy go" of the prostitute. It had come from some depths which he had never fathomed. But just because he had never fathomed those depths he felt himself morally free to ignore them. He had taken nothing from Andrina which she had not been willing to give. He had given her nothing which she had not been

eager to have. He had done her no harm. Again and again, as if in argument with an opponent, he insisted upon this—he had done her no harm. He had taught her to live and to love, but her attachment to him had never been guessed, except perhaps by that gay old bird Tan' Linda, and there was no reason why it should ever become known—no reason why, on her part or on his, it should ever be regretted. But she must not take its inevitable ending hard. She must face it with common-sense. And she would. Was not her whole outlook on life courageous in its simplicity? Did she not know that happiness is never lasting? Had she not learned that experience is the salt of life? She was young. She was beautiful. Tan' Linda would soon be marrying her to some steady young bijwoner in the valley. . . .

He was moving now restlessly about the room smoking his pipe. The sooner the whole thing was settled and done with now, he thought, the better. He would speak at once to Mevrouw and Mijnheer. Explain to them that he must go over the mountains to Princestown—the nearest telegraph office—to cable to England, and that his future movements would depend upon the reply that came to his cable. Yes. A little indefiniteness might soften the break for Andrina. . . . He would keep his plans for the future indefinite. . . . But he would leave Harmonie at once. Bor-

row a cart and horses from Mijnheer and not wait for the weekly post-cart. A little abrupt perhaps, but no more abrupt than his coming to Harmonie had been. No more abrupt than his coming to Africa had been. . . .

The sense of a need for urgency—that false craving for speed which so often and so dangerously afflicts the idle—began to grow upon him. He encouraged it. It dulled his thoughts of Andrina, which wavered curiously between a tender regret for the child whom he must hurt and something which came perilously near to the resentment felt by the oppressor towards the oppressed. And it sharpened his desire to get from Lettice something more than an admission in a note of two sentences of his power over her. Yes, he would leave in haste. To leave in haste is the easiest of leave-takings. He would speak to Mevrouw and Mijnheer after supper that evening.

Crossing the room he caught sight of his portmanteau, stopped, pulled it out from the wall and opened it. On the dividing flap was an oblong pocket of shiny red leather, fastened with an elastic cord and a small black button. He opened the pocket and drew from it a little bundle of photographs, among them one of Elinor and her children and one of Lettice.

He walked across to the garden window, studying, in the deepening dusk, the small brown head

and the alert, mischievous, amused expression of Lettice Featherstone. This was Lettice, just as her note was Lettice. And here, too, was that likeness to Emerentia. He had not been mistaken about that. There was in both Emerentia and Lettice that provocative suggestion of impudence which never actually becomes impudent. He smiled as he noted it. Lettice would need some handling. Well, he would handle her. . . .

He became conscious suddenly of a hammering against his closed door and realized that for some time this hammering had been playing an accompaniment to his thoughts. Tossing the photographs on to the table, he pulled aside the guarding stool.

"Mijnheer," cried Jantje, tumbling in upon him, "have you been then asleep? Long ago it was suppertime!"

XIII

For Jantje supper was an enchanted meal which only on rare occasions he was allowed to share. He owed his good fortune to-night partly to the disturbance caused by Emerentia's visit and partly to an unusual forgetfulness in Mevrouw, to whom the post had brought a letter from his parents. Of this letter, which so intimately concerned himself, Jantje as yet knew

nothing. With his chair drawn close to Mevrouw's he had no thought beyond the scene around him. All life was adventure to Jantje, but at this moment it was the lamp in the centre of the table which made it so intensely adventure. The lamp, bought at a store in Platkops dorp by Mijnheer on one of his visits to the market there, had a small metal stand, a clear glass bowl for the oil, and a plain white shade. It possessed no beauty whatever, yet the circle of light cast by the shade on the table, and the little shells from Zandtbaai placed in the base of the bowl to clear the oil, spelt enchantment for the small boy.

Round the lamp the table was spread with various dishes of fruits and preserves, with plates of that dark brown bread which is so nearly black and so nearly sour, with dishes of sliced biltong, fried eggs, salt ribitjes done on the gridiron, and pot-roasted chickens. Strong, black, bitter coffee, in the heavy, rose-decked cups, was served by Andrina, who had entered the dining-room hurriedly after the rest of the household was seated. To the smell of coffee, of lamp oil, of rich food—all so delightful to the eager Jantje—was added the human odour of the two small native children, indentured in service to Mevrouw and Mijnheer, who, alert and eager as monkeys, watched the proceedings from behind their master's and mistress's chairs.

The lamp on the table was the only light in the long, lofty room from the far corners of which loomed a darkness that added to Jantje's sense of enchantment and, curiously, to his feeling of safety by his grandmother's side. Now and then Mevrouw, feeling his hot, sticky hand seeking hers, would smile down upon his upturned face and murmur gently, under cover of Tan' Linda's chatter: "My little springbok! My little heart-thief!"

It was Tan' Linda this evening who did most of the talking. Emerentia's visit had been a triumph for Tan' Linda. She was loud in her praises, directed at the silent Frikkie, of Mevrouw de Jager's niece. She was arch. She was knowing. She was noisy. She was, in short, in her element. So quick and bright and amusing was Emerentia! So friendly and sweet-natured! And one needn't think that boarding-school in Cape Town had spoiled her. No. There was no nonsense in her head! Her head was packed full of common-sense as well as book-learning! Why, that very morning she had cut up a sheep for Engela de Jager with all the skill of a long-married woman. So beautifully had she done it that Engela had regretted that she had no unmarried son who could make her his wife. Yes, Engela, who had searched the whole Platkops district for suitable wives for her sons, had said that.

in the midst of her praises she caught, suddenly, the amused glance of the Englishman. There was indeed something more than amusement in his glance. Was it excitement? Had Emerentia made an impression upon the Englishman as well as upon Frikkie? She brushed the dangerous thought aside. No, no! She had not got a wife from Schoongesicht for the Englishman. She had got one for Frikkie. Andrina was the Englishman's!

She turned to look at Andrina. How quiet the child was! How silent even in her movements! And how beautiful. Yes, to-night, with the light of the lamp upon her, she had the still sad beauty of the carved angel in Platkops church —and Tan' Linda, like many other dwellers in the wide Platkops district, knew of nothing more beautiful than the carved angel in Platkops church. But the girl's sadness troubled her. Why did she look so sad?

Suddenly across her gaiety and her sense of achievement there ran a vague uneasiness. She turned involuntarily to the Englishman and found his gaze now resting on Andrina. He was no longer amused. He was no longer excited. It was almost as if he were pained. Pained? What could there be in what he now saw in Andrina to pain him? Had they quarrelled? Then they must make it up! Life was too short for

quarrels. Surely they did not need an old maid to teach them that! But if they did she would teach them. Yes. She must see about it. But not now. No. This was not the moment for such lessons. She must await a more suitable opportunity. It was bound to come.

She turned again to Frikkie, leaving the Englishman still quietly studying Andrina. Though he had never had the good fortune to see the carved angel in Platkops church, he too had been struck this evening by the stillness of Andrina's beauty, contrasting it perhaps unconsciously with Emerentia's dark vivacity. And he too was troubled by her sadness. Of what was she thinking? Could her sadness come, by any possible chance, from some fore-knowledge of his plans? There was no possible chance of this! No one knew his plans but himself. She had no right yet to be sad! Such sadness added to the difficulties of his position. It would inevitably rob her of some of her common-sense—and it was with common-sense that he now most ardently desired her to face the immediate future. In her sadness there was for him the first hint of reproach that his relations with the girl had ever brought him. Yet how, at this moment, could he with justice suspect her of reproach? Was he beginning to develop a peculiar sort of conscience? Then indeed it was time he left Harmonie! Yet now, when

the need for haste was so forcibly brought home to him, he found himself troubled by his first hampering doubt, his first compassionate regret.

Slowly, through magic for Jantje, through preoccupation for Mevrouw, through noisy talk for Tan' Linda, silence for Frikkie, sadness for Andrina, vague uneasiness for the Englishman and quiet withdrawal for Mijnheer, the meal drew to its close. When the last of the dishes was cleared away, the great Bible was placed before Mijnheer. From a drawer in the sideboard Andrina brought the psalm-books—one for each person round the table and one for the Englishman among the rest. From the kitchen quarters came the native servants, crowding in the doorway without entering the room and squatting down there upon the floor. The chapter was read. The psalm was sung. Jantje, slipping from his chair, walked up to his grandfather's knee and repeated his evening prayer. From the doorway came the indentured children and they too, at their master's knee, repeated a prayer. "Make me to be obedient to my mistress, Oh Lord," prayed Spaasie in her rough, hoarse voice. "Make me to run quickly when my master calls," prayed Klaas.

It was Mevrouw who, when talk became general again, made the first move from the table. It was long past Jantje's bed-time, she said, and Andrina must take him off at once. "At once,"

she repeated and stooped to kiss her little heart-thief good-night. She was still preoccupied and in preoccupation, with a murmured apology to her guest, rose from the table and left the room. Tan' Linda, bound for the post-office, where the sorting of the mail was not yet finished, was next to go. The Englishman found himself alone with Frikkie and Mijnheer.

He turned to Frikkie, who, though he seldom spoke it, understood English.

"Will you ask your father for me if he can spare me a cart and horses to go over the mountains to Princestown?" he asked. "The mail has brought me a letter which has to be answered at once. I must get over to Princestown as soon as I can to cable from there."

For the first time that evening Frikkie smiled. For the first time since his coming to Harmonie the Englishman had, that afternoon, impressed himself as a personality upon Frikkie. The Englishman would never, God help him! make any sort of a farmer, but Frikkie was not so sure that he would not make a serious sort of rival to the affections of Emerentia. His feeling about this was not yet definite enough to be called jealousy, but it did in fact come near enough to jealousy to make him think that the other side of the mountains was the best place for Englishmen.

He repeated the young man's request to his

father and made answer for him: "Surely we will be able to spare you a cart and horses. Is it to-morrow that you would go?"

"Thanks, yes. If that suits you."

"It will suit. Mijnheer means to come back to the valley?"

"I'm not sure. I may be returning to England," answered the Englishman with careful carelessness, and heard, as he spoke, the door of Jantje's bedroom quietly close.

XIV

At the foot of the bed in Jantje's room sat Andrina. The room was in darkness and Jantje himself had long since fallen asleep. But still she sat there—her body as immovable in her sorrow as was the carved stone angel in Platkops church, her mind working clearly through the anguish of her heart. This was the end. She who had never dared to hope did not dare now to doubt. This was the end. The Englishman was leaving her. Her dear Arry—her dear, dear love—was leaving her.

With that direct simplicity which the Englishman took for courage and which was perhaps but the fatalism of her race or the humility of her spirit, she accepted this fact. She did not judge. Judge? How should she judge? If it

was God who had brought the Englishman to her was it not as certainly God who was taking him from her? And who was she that he should stay for her? Had not his going from the first been inevitable, though in her joy she had failed to see it? Ah, she knew it was inevitable now! What other end could there be but this? Marriage? She shrank from that presumptuous thought as from a sacrilege. No, no, God forgive her, she was not worthy of marriage with the Englishman. To be such a wife as the Englishman needed was beyond her power. It was not as his wife that she was fitted to serve him. It was not as his wife that she was fitted to love him before the world. Such honour was not for her. She knew it! She knew it! Was not her dear Arry as high above her as were the heavens above the earth?

In what then lay the sharpness of her sorrow? Was it in the knowledge, gained so strangely that afternoon, that though she was not fitted to become his wife there was some one else who was? Some one as gay and charming, perhaps, as Emerentia Viljoen . . . some one whose photograph, when she ran out to tidy his room before supper, she had found on his table . . . and whose little note she had watched him read as he stood in the doorway of the post-office . . . ?

Her honesty compelled her to admit that this

was so. Never before had she suffered the anguish of jealousy, yet was not this, in part, what she was suffering now? The thought was terrible to her. Jealous? How could she be jealous of one whom the Englishman loved? Must not those who were dear to him be dear also to her, though they should rob her of him? Could she wish to limit his love to one so poor in gifts as herself? No, no, even if it were possible to limit his love to herself she must not wish it. And it was not possible. It was not she but the writer of the little note who now held the Englishman's love. She knew it. And she knew also, with a knowledge that was robbed of its bitterness by her humility, though it filled her gentle heart with sadness, that such love as he had for this stranger had never been hers.

In her sadness she lived again through those moments which had brought this revelation to her. Once again she saw the Englishman coming into the post-office for his mail. Once again she saw the slight stiffening of surprise as he took from her a small note in a hand that was new to her. Once again she saw the little upward jerk of the head—so dear and so familiar to her—as he began to read. Once again she saw his smile—so ironic and so eager and so tender—as he read. And once again she saw that sudden radiance which, following his smile, had brought a beauty

that was almost glory to the face she loved. . . . Quickly he had thrust his note into his pocket and as quickly withdrawn and re-read it, then turned and, smiling upon her vaguely as upon a stranger, gathered up his papers and left the post-office.

It was in this moment that, for Andrina, the end of all that was dear to her had come. Beyond all doubting and disputing she had known it. It had needed neither the finding of the photograph in the Englishman's room nor the overhearing of his request for a cart to take him to Princestown to prove this to her. By that strange radiance lighting up his face as he read she had known it. Such glory had never shone in his face for her and it bound him, by a right that in her singleness of heart was clear to her as an ordinance of God, to the woman who had evoked it. He was hers. And he must go to her.

Yet suddenly now, as she sat in the darkness, at the thought of his going there swept through her heart so sharp a sense of her coming desolation that her anguish became a panic. How could she let him go? How could she bear his going? She could not bear it! She could not bear it! Never again to feel his hand upon her, comforting her body—never again to hear his voice—never again to hear the steady beat of his heart as she lay in his arms—to lose for ever and ever that sense of security which he alone in all the

world had brought her. . . . She could not bear it, she could not bear it! Had not he himself awakened her to the knowledge of the beauty and the hunger of her body? Had not he himself called forth the woman in her? It was for him alone that this woman lived. She must die if he left her. How then could he leave her? Had he awakened her but to leave her to perish? Was this that "fulfilment" of her love of which he had spoken?

Fulfilment . . . fulfilment. . . . How strangely now that strange word echoed through her tender and desolate heart. Was it in mockery that the Englishman had used it? She could not believe it. Even in her anguish her heart cried out for justice to him there. It was not in mockery that he had brought her such joy as had never before been hers. It was not in mockery that he had warned her that for such joy she might have to suffer pain. It was not in mockery that he had called her his adorable child and yet refrained from giving her any dearer name than this. In nothing had he deceived her. It was she who had failed to realize that his tenderness towards her had been the tenderness felt for a child, not the love aroused and held by a woman. She realized it now. Arry was no more to blame for the love which he felt for the stranger than she was to blame for the love which she felt for him. . . .

Love . . . love? What was love? Had Tan' Coba been right when she said that for some it was but a sorrow with an end that was harder than death?

At this thought panic again overwhelmed her and she slipped from the bed on to the floor and knelt there, pressing her head against Jantje's pillow. She was crying, and as she cried she whispered over and over again the name of her dear, dear love, her dear, dear Arry. . . . Ah, he must leave her, he must leave her, but she must still love him. Well she knew that there was nothing now that her love could do for him but let him go! And for this surely the Heavenly Father would give her strength. Surely in His pity He would help her! She would pray to Him. She who for weeks and months past had knelt only to thank Him for bringing the Englishman to her must pray to Him now for strength to let him go. . . . Our Father. . . . Our Father. . . .

At her cry—the cry of all her simple race to their God—Jantje stirred in his sleep and flung himself across the pillow towards her. She drew him, still sleeping, into her arms, pressing his head against her breast. Her body felt strained and numbed, and she was conscious, as once or twice she had been of late, of a slight faintness as she knelt. But the faintness passed. She drew Jantje still more closely towards her. The warmth of

his little body nestling against her own—his helplessness—brought comfort slowly back to her soul. So, once, had she held her dear Arry. . . . So, for ever, though he now must leave her, would she hold him in her heart. . . . Our Father, she prayed. . . . Our Father. . . . Our Father. . . .

XV

ANDRINA was still kneeling by the side of Jantje's bed when Mevrouw came quietly into the room.

"Does he not sleep?" she asked in quick anxiety.

"He sleeps now, Mevrouw," answered Andrina. "Mevrouw needs me?" She rose from the floor.

"Yes, my child," sighed Mevrouw. She sat down heavily on the second bed and drew Andrina down beside her. "Andrintje," she said, "see how it is. Jantje's mother is ill and she frets now so for the child that his father has sent for him. This day I had his letter. And he asks that you should take Jantje up to them and stay with his wife till she is better. Already I have been to your aunt Johanna. She is glad that you should go. Tan' Coba also. . . . Will you go, my child?"

"Surely I will go," answered Andrina simply.

"Mijnheer himself will take you so far as Malgas," said Mevrouw, "and there Jantje's father

will meet you. In two days you will go. . . . It will go hard with me without you, Andrintje!"

"Mevrouw is kind. . . ."

Mevrouw sighed again. The news in her son's letter had troubled her and the thought of losing both Jantje and Andrina weighed heavily upon her. Yet she, like Johanna, though for different reasons, thought this visit up-country might be a good thing for the girl. It was not right that she should be tied for ever to Harmonie. But she would miss her!

For a little while they sat in silence, Mevrouw holding the girl's hand in hers. Then she roused herself with a gentle "al-le-wereld!" and said: "See now, my child! This letter for the Englishman. Tan' Linda found it when she shook out the bag. Take it to him. I must still speak with Mijnheer."

Andrina took the letter and after Mevrouw had left the room stood for a moment irresolute. How should she go to him and not betray her sorrow? How should she go to him and guard her heart against that terrifying anguish of jealousy? Was there to be no end to the pain of her love? Was this all that from hour to hour, from day to day, from year to year, life was to hold for her? Oh, she could not bear it, she could not bear it! Yet even as that cry was once again wrung from her,

she knew that she must bear it—that life, for most, was the bearing of unbearable things.

Slowly, as she stood in the darkness, she mastered her emotion and faced her fear. Was she not, even now, being given help to bear what lay before her? Would it not be easier for her to go right away with little Jantje and learn among strangers how to hide her sorrow? Was it not in this way that her Heavenly Father was once again proving His care for her? Was there not indeed, if she could but read it, a clear working of God's will through all the strange and unforeseen and bewildering happenings of that crowded day? She could not doubt it! And to God's will, so far as she could read it, she must hold herself obedient. She must be brave in the doing of what, in answer to His will, she felt to be right. She must be wise. And she must go now, with his letter, to the Englishman.

The Englishman's door was closed, but before she had time to tap he himself opened it and drew her into the room.

"I've wanted you," he said, in a voice that was strange and troubled and abrupt and harsh.

"I have brought Mijnheer still another letter," explained Andrina gently. The tone of his voice, so new to her, disturbed her. She could not guess what lay behind it. That he might be suffering

twinges of conscience about matters for which, either on his part or her own, she herself felt none, did not strike her. His going was for her now not only inevitable but a bare act of justice to the woman whom he loved and whose love he held. In no way must she come between them.

The young man took the letter from her and tossed it without a glance on to the table. "I've wanted you," he said again, still harshly. Putting his hands on her shoulders, he drew her into the small circle of light cast by a single candle. Why was it that with the closing of Jantje's door his mood had changed so suddenly from triumph and exhilaration to this vague dissatisfaction, this strange distress of spirit? He could not say.

"Look up at me, Andrina!"

Andrina looked up, her eyes brimming with unshed tears, her lips trembling. To comfort this dear and troubled Arry she smiled.

"What is it that Mijnheer wanted of me?" she asked.

The Englishman did not answer. What was it indeed that he had wanted of her? Common-sense? Was not her common-sense at this moment greater than his own? Yet how strange and mysterious she was to him! Of what was she thinking? How much did she know? How much had she heard before she closed Jantje's door? How much had she guessed?

Again Andrina spoke. Somehow she must ease him of his trouble, for that his trouble now concerned herself she did not doubt.

"Was it to tell me that he must leave me that Mijnheer wanted me?" she asked. "That I already know."

She spoke so quietly that the young man was almost shocked. Common-sense! He came near, at that moment, to resenting it! Here was nothing that he had feared. Here was no reproach. Here was no accusation. Yet now the very absence of reproach seemed somehow to reproach him.

"How did you know?" he asked sharply. "Who told you?"

"It was from Mijnheer himself that I knew it —when he read his letter in the post-office. . . ."

"Andrina!"

"In his face I saw it," whispered Andrina.

Suddenly, a little roughly, the Englishman tilted up her chin and looked down upon her in the flickering light.

"What did you see in his face?" he asked.

"Mijnheer knows what it was. Why should he make me say it? He must leave me. Is not that what he wished to tell me?"

For a moment the young man did not answer. When he did the harshness had gone from his

voice and it was the old Arry who spoke, grave and tender, and concerned as for a child.

"Yes, that is what he had to tell you. . . . He was—troubled about you, Andrina."

"Mijnheer must not be troubled. It is right that he should go."

"Right," thought the young man eagerly. Yes, but how strange that she should realize it! Yet was it strange? Was it not, simply, proof that he had been wise to count upon her common-sense and courage?

"Now that he has to leave you, you don't regret his coming to you, do you, Andrina?"

"No, Mijnheer."

"You will always be glad that he came?"

"Mijnheer knows it."

"No, Mijnheer knows very little about you," smiled the Englishman. "Very, very little."

His good-humour, his buoyancy, his excitement—all these were rapidly returning. Miraculously for him the immediate ordeal was over. Andrina, incomprehensible child, incomprehensible woman, was not taking it hard. He was conscious of a vague disappointment mingling with his relief, but relief was uppermost in his feelings. The future, not the past, claimed his thoughts. Looking down upon Andrina he saw her but as a child in the far distance of a coun-

try which his mind had already left. From that distance neither her love nor her sorrow could reach him. He was free.

Andrina, watching the face that was so dear to her, knew that his concern for her was over, and through her sorrow and her strange, benumbed physical weariness there crept something that to her too was almost relief. It would be easier, so, to hide from him the pain in her heart. And she must still hide it. To hide it and to let him go was all that there remained for her to do for her dear, dear love. . . .

But it was not all. Through the dim candlelight she became conscious slowly of the disorder of the room. Already the Englishman had begun his preparations for packing. But how clumsy they were! How wild and confused! His clothes all over the place and his portmanteau already more than half filled! Did he mean to get all that remained into the other half of his portmanteau . . . ?

She turned to him shyly, to prove to him once again, though she did not know it, her commonsense and courage, and to ease, though he did not guess it, her desolate heart by this last act of service to him.

"If Mijnheer will but let me," she said, "I will now pack for him."

PART IV

I

It was in the heat of summer that Andrina had gone up-country with Jantje, and now in the Aangenaam valley the hot, dry autumn winds had given way to the cooler, quieter days of winter and the yearly Thanksgiving at Harmonie was at hand. At the homestead the intervening months had passed with little adventure beyond Frikkie's courtship of Emerentia Viljoen. In this Tan' Linda had found her chief consolation for the amazing and incomprehensible interference of Providence in the romance which she had planned for Andrina and the Englishman. For the strange, complete and sudden ending to this affair Tan' Linda came as near bearing a grudge against the Almighty as was possible to one of her cheerful and lively temperament. But with Frikkie she had cause for nothing but intense satisfaction. In every way he was living up to her hopes of him as an earnest young man in love. Most engagingly had he lost not only his heart but his head, and in this his very foolishnesses were sweet to her. So, by contrast, was the serenity of Emerentia, who, whatever might happen to the head and heart of Frikkie, retained full possession of her own.

But in spite of her satisfaction about Frikkie there were many moments in the post-office, where she constantly missed Andrina, when Tan' Linda's thoughts would go back in puzzlement and regret to the Englishman. How was it that things had ended so strangely and so suddenly there? How was it that, just when she was preparing to astonish the world with her secret, that secret had ceased to exist? Had she hugged it to her heart too long and so missed the favourable moment for the fruition of her plans? She could not tell. She knew only that when first the Englishman drove out of the yard on his way to Princestown, and then Andrina on her way to Caroline, she felt as if in this sweeping aside of her hopes and schemes God had publicly rebuked her.

As gaily as he had come to them, it seemed to Tan' Linda now, had the Englishman left them. In nothing at their leave-taking in the yard had there been any betrayal of their real feelings by Andrina and the young man. It was not here, Tan' Linda felt, that the end had come for them. But when had it come? And where? And why? To these questions she found no answer. Andrina's sadness at the supper-table on the day of Emerentia's visit, and the young man's subdued excitement and consequent uneasiness as his gaze had come to rest upon the girl, explained noth-

ing to her. They deepened, rather, a mystery which was not, as she at first had thought it, a lovers' quarrel, and left her troubled by an unaccustomed sense of failure. In some way she felt she must herself have been to blame for this miscarriage of her plans. She had failed not only with the Englishman but with Jan Beyers, for surely if she had foreseen this ending to the Englishman's romance she would have kept Jan Beyers in reserve for Andrina. Jan Beyers had certainly, before he took his letter to Betje Ferriera, wanted Andrina. Or was it only the beadle's two plough-oxen that he had wanted?

Here for Tan' Linda was another unsolved mystery. It would never now, she supposed, be revealed to her why Aalst Vlokman had offered his oxen to Jan Beyers as a marriage portion for Andrina du Toit. There was for her in this a hint of that madness under which, she was convinced, in spite of all good Alida's gentle protests, the beadle laboured. Only a sort of madness could explain Aalst Vlokman to Tan' Linda, and madness explained him very well. Alida might shake her head, but Tan' Linda knew better. Why, as she looked back upon it now, she could see plainly that all through the Englishman's visit the beadle had been growing stranger in his ways. It was after the Englishman came that he first began to neglect his lands, and now, so one of the coloured

boys had told her, he would sit for hours under a tree gazing out across the world at nothing. So impressed had she been by this picture of the beadle gazing out across the world at nothing that she had even ventured to question Johanna and Jacoba Steenkamp about him. But neither from Johanna's ironic silence, nor from Jacoba's flustered timidity—and surely, thought Tan' Linda, Jacoba was ill? But no, when questioned about it, Jacoba denied that she was ill—could she glean anything about Aalst Vlokman's madness. Only when she remarked how on mail-day the beadle hung about the yard, as if expecting a letter that never came, did she catch a troubled appealing glance from Jacoba to Johanna. From Johanna herself there came no sign.

Johanna's silence was, in fact, triumphant, and by no spoken protest did Jacoba dare to break it. It was to make Aalst Vlokman suffer that Johanna withheld from him all news from the Caroline district as it had been to make him suffer that she had given her consent to Mevrouw when asked to allow Andrina to go up-country with Jantje. True she had not been unaware of definite advantages to her niece in this arrangement, but her first thought when Mevrouw stated her errand on the evening of Emerentia's visit had been one of triumph over the beadle. In the Caroline district, she had reflected grimly,

Klaartje's Andrina would be beyond Aalst Vlokman's reach.

Close upon the satisfaction of that evening had come one of those inspirations to cruelty which in some natures are the strange and bitter fruit of righteousness. On the following day, after the Englishman's sudden departure, Aalst Vlokman, who knew nothing as yet of Mevrouw's plans for Andrina and Jantje, broke his silence at the midday meal.

"He's gone then," he said; "he's gone then—the young man that you dressed up Andrina like a doll for."

It was a jeer, and Johanna knew it. It was also the cry of relief of a tortured spirit, and this she did not know, or did not care to know. For his jeer Aalst Vlokman should suffer. She had but to keep silence to-day and to-morrow would bring her her revenge.

It was, as she had planned it, down in his lands that, next morning, she had her revenge. Here, in a strange exultant energy born of relief at the Englishman's departure from Harmonie and of hope for Andrina's future, the beadle had laboured from sun-up. And down to him here came Johanna, with vengeance in her heart and in her hands his midday meal tied up between two plates in a red-and-white handkerchief. Without preliminaries she struck.

"And she also has gone, Aalst Vlokman," she said, as if carrying on the conversation of the day before. "She also has gone. Klaartje's Andrina. The doll that I dressed for the Englishman. What say you to that now, beadle?"

"You lie," cried the beadle. "You lie!"

"And why should I lie?" asked Johanna. "Why should she not go? Do you think, Aalst Vlokman, that it was the Englishman that came back for her? With a wagon in the night like the man that took Klaartje to Platkops? Is it a thing that every man would do? Is that what you think? Think it, then, beadle! Think it then!"

She turned to go, and in an agony that knew no pride the beadle called after her: "If she has not gone to the Englishman where then has she gone?"

Once again Johanna faced him—cold, deliberate, bitter, and righteous. "What is it to you, Aalst Vlokman," she asked, "where Klaartje's Andrina has gone?"

For a moment, grim and ironic, she paused for the answer that did not come, and then turned and swept triumphant across the lands. Soon, she knew, the beadle must learn where Andrina had gone, but let him suffer a little first! Let him suffer! This was her prayer in her righteousness. Let the sinner suffer, O Lord!

And her prayer had been answered. Indeed it

had been more than answered, for the beadle's suffering had not ceased when he learned that Andrina had gone up-country with Jantje. His fears then had but taken another form. What might not Andrina be finding up-country? In what danger might she not discover herself with no friend at hand to help her? She had escaped disaster with the Englishman, but who could say that she was safe in Caroline? Johanna might taunt him as she would with the fact that all men did not come in the night with wagons to steal young girls away, but the world was full of such men! And to his tortured imagination the Caroline district was now their particular dwelling-place.

These were the fears which, week after week, arousing in Tan' Linda not wholly unpleasant forebodings of madness, had driven him up to the post-office on mail-days to glean such news as he could there of Andrina's safety up-country. Through these fears there had drifted of late the hope that Andrina would be returning to Harmonie with Mijnheer Cornelius and his family for the coming Thanksgiving. And this was surely, he thought, the news in the letter which Tan' Linda, the week before the Thanksgiving, put into his hands on mail-day and asked him to deliver to Jacoba.

II

To Jacoba the sudden sweeping of Andrina up-country had been calamity as droughts and floods, locusts and rinderpests are calamities, and as such she had accepted and borne it. But though her mind did not go probing into mysteries like Tan' Linda's, and though she was beset by no such fears about Klaartje's child as haunted the beadle, there was in her heart a sense of uneasiness and bewilderment such as no devastation of drought or flood had ever yet brought her. Many times did her thoughts go back to the day which had taken the Englishman from Harmonie. On that day Andrina, who was to leave early next morning with Mijnheer and little Jantje, had come down to her aunts at nightfall to bid them good-bye, and Jacoba had walked back to the homestead with her alone. Yet though the girl had clung close to Jacoba's arm she had not spoken, and from the older woman there had come only little broken murmurs of endearment. Even when, after they had parted, Andrina had run back to fling her arms once again around her dear Tan' Coba, to kiss her passionately through her tears, she had spoken no word of what lay in her heart. And Jacoba, humble even in her love, had not dared to touch upon her sorrow.

On the following day, with Mijnheer and

Jantje, Andrina had set off for Caroline, and from that hour, it seemed to Jacoba, silence had risen like a wall between them. Never had any of Andrina's letters, written jointly to her aunts but addressed always to Johanna as the elder, broken down this wall. To her aunts as to Mevrouw she wrote only of the general state of health in Mijnheer Cornelius's family and of his wife's health in particular, and of the general state of the weather in the Caroline district. From these rare and strangely impersonal notes Jacoba, conscious always when they came of the pain round her heart, had drawn such comfort as she could. But as the weeks slipped by into months her loneliness and her physical distress had steadily increased, and now, because for several weeks there had come no news from Andrina whatever, and to-day's mail must say definitely whether or not she would be returning with the Caroline family for the Thanksgiving, hope itself had become an anguish to her. It was to hide her suffering from Johanna that, after the post-cart drove up to the homestead, she left the house and went down to the orchard.

Her pain, which for years had come to her with any sharp emotion or unaccustomed physical strain, was something which Jacoba herself could no longer ignore. For the last three months with each fresh attack she had made up her mind to

speak of it to Johanna, and as each attack subsided had, in her relief, refrained from doing so. Johanna had always been impatient of any form of illness. Illness for her had none of the fascination that it had for many of the Aangenaam women, cut off as they were from the advice of a doctor, and dependent upon each other for such home-made cures as a limited experience adventurously suggested. Johanna resented illness. It was in some way a disgrace to those who suffered from it, and whenever possible she ignored it. Thus it was that, though several times of late Jacoba had found Johanna looking at her sharply, she had never yet, with courage to bear her pain, found courage to speak of it.

Jacoba was still in the orchard when the beadle came down from the post-office with Andrina's letter. The possession of Andrina's letter had brought him a definite sense of power. It was Jacoba's letter, not Johanna's, and only to Jacoba would he deliver it. Moreover he would give it up to her only if he found her alone, and only after she had promised to share it with him. On this point his mind was made up. Jacoba must tell him the news in her letter. She must tell him if Andrina were coming for the Thanksgiving. She must tell him if all were well with Klaartje's child. He had a right to know. And from the timid Jacoba he could insist upon knowing.

As he neared the house he saw Johanna busy at the soap-pot in the yard. There was no sign of Jacoba. He passed Johanna without greeting and went on towards the orchard. The letter in his pocket, he thought triumphantly, was not Johanna's. It was for Jacoba, and in the orchard, sitting on a tree-stump, he saw Jacoba. Jacoba, he thought vaguely, had fallen into a strange habit of late of sitting down suddenly and anywhere.

As he raised the wire hoop of the orchard gate Jacoba rose, stood still for a moment, and then came slowly towards him.

"What is it, Aalst Vlokman?" she asked.

The beadle did not answer. Something in the tone of her voice, in her gentleness, had aroused in him an intense irritation and suddenly his sense of triumph deserted him. Why after all these years did Jacoba speak to him so humbly? Why after all these years did her humility seem to him like an accusation? Of what was she accusing him now? Of holding back her letter until he had forced her to promise to share it with him? But she knew nothing as yet about her letter! She knew nothing of the demands he intended to make. How then could she accuse him of them?

The beadle did not see how Jacoba might accuse him, but that she did accuse him he was convinced. And his conviction drove him, through anger and resentment, to perversity. Jacoba was already

prepared to have something further to forgive, was she? Very well then, she should have nothing further to forgive. She should have her letter without stipulations. He would get the better of her there! She should have it. She should have it!

He thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out the letter. "Take it," he said contemptuously. "It is to you that she writes this day and not to Johanna."

He moved away as he spoke and something of triumph returned to him. He had beaten her! She should keep her letter as Johanna had kept all hers.

But Jacoba had no wish to keep her letter as Johanna had kept hers. Never before had a letter come addressed to her. Never yet, for all her silent pleading, had the beadle been allowed to share any of those addressed to Johanna. But this one Aalst Vlokman should share. Yes, whatever Johanna might afterwards say about it, this one, her own, the beadle should share. And surely it would have in it the news at last that Andrina was coming down to them for the Thanksgiving.

"Wait then, Aalst Vlokman," she said, putting her hand on his arm to stop him. "Wait then! Would you not like to hear what Andrina writes in her letter?"

The beadle stopped.

"What say you?" he asked.

"Andrina's letter," repeated Jacoba timidly. "Would you not like now to hear what she writes in it?"

At her question the beadle's soul leapt from triumph to a riot of cruelty that came near to the madness so eagerly feared by Tan' Linda. Ha! Jacoba was running after him with her letter, was she? Running after him with her gentleness and her humility? Well, let her run! He who had come into the orchard determined to share Andrina's letter by force would accept no share in it now as a gift.

"And why should I like to hear it?" he asked. "Tell me, Jacoba—why should I like to hear it?"

Jacoba's hand slipped from his arm. Her face, flushed with emotion and hope, grew pale and drawn. Like a timid child rebuffed she moved away from him while still, with strangely blazing eyes, the beadle gazed at her. His triumph—so different from the triumph that he first had planned—was complete. He had hurt her as he could never hope to hurt Johanna. He was paying her back in pain at last for all her gentleness towards him. Had it not tortured him through all these years as bitterly as Johanna's righteousness and scorn?

"Keep you your letter to yourself, Jacoba Steenkamp," he said, moving deliberately away from

her. "Keep you your letter to yourself as Johanna has kept hers. What is Klaartje's child to me?"

III

As the beadle left her Jacoba crept back to her tree-stump. The pain round her heart, and the blurring of her sight which it caused, made reading, which was never easy to her, for the moment impossible. She must wait, hoarding her breath like a miser because of the pain it cost her to part with it, until this fresh attack was over before she could read her little Andrintje's letter.

In her pain she had lost control of her thoughts, and they were passing now through her mind with that rapid, detached and anguished clarity which sometimes accompanies physical suffering. She must speak at once with Johanna about the beadle. Something terrible was happening to him, something strange and evil, and worse than anything at which Juffrouw de Neysen had hinted. Only under the influence of something evil could he have refused to share Andrina's letter or spoken of Klaartje's child as he had done. And for this surely Johanna herself was partly to blame. Surely Johanna had but to forgive him and let him share in the care of Klaartje's child for this evil that was working in him to turn to good. And why should Johanna refuse him for-

giveness? Why should she for ever taunt him? If Klaartje had forgiven him the wrong he had done her—and surely Klaartje, if she had not forgiven him on earth had long since forgiven him from heaven—why could not Johanna grant him forgiveness too? Of forgiveness from herself he had never been in need. No, whatever Johanna might still feel about that, she, Jacoba, had never felt that Aalst Vlokman had needed forgiveness from her. What had she to forgive? Could one put love in a halter and say: "There you shall go, but you shall not go there"? Could she have kept Aalst Vlokman's love by doing this? Well she knew that she could not have kept it! Through all these years Klaartje had held it—and Klaartje's Andrina.

Her little Andrintje! How full of anguish and how full of joy had been that moment for her when Johanna, leaning over the side of the ox-cart on her return from Platkops dorp, had put Klaartje's child into her arms! Always, from that moment, the child had been hers. Never in any way had Johanna come between them or sought to come between them. How generous and how noble had Johanna been in this! Why then could she not be generous towards the beadle? Oh, she must speak to her about this! She must speak before it was too late. There must be peace between Johanna and Aalst Vlok-

man before Andrina came back to them. Could they not see how dangerous to Klaartje's child was the increasing bitterness of their warfare? Would they break Andrina's heart as they had come so near to breaking hers? Oh, she must speak to Johanna, she must speak to her! Had not her darling sorrow enough of her own to bear without being made to suffer through the bitterness of others?

But of Andrina's sorrow she could not speak to Johanna. Johanna had never guessed what the beadle had guessed—that Andrintje had loved the Englishman. Never, even to herself, had Andrina breathed his name. "I cannot name him," she had whispered, here, in the orchard, on the day that she refused Jan Beyers's letter. "I cannot name him." But there had been no need to name him. It was the Englishman whom she had loved. It was for the Englishman that she had lived. And how shy and beautiful had been her love! How full of joy her living! Why had it then to end in sorrow? And to end so strangely and so suddenly. . . . The young man going over the mountains to Princestown one day and Andrina setting off to Caroline the next. Andrina, white and still, sitting in the cart by Jantje's side . . . what had been in her heart as she drove away? What had been in her heart through the silence of these last months? In none of her letters had

there been any complaint, yet always to Jacoba they had brought sadness. Always they had made her feel that she must go to her as once, long ago, she had wished to go to Klaartje. . . .

But there would be no need to go to her now. Andrintje would be with them soon now for the Thanksgiving. She was sure of this. Yet how was she so sure? Was it in her letter? But she had not yet been able to read her letter. She was not clever at reading like Johanna. But perhaps, she could see to read it now. Her pain was still there but she could see through it now. Yes, she would be able to spell out some of Andrina's letter now. And when she had read it she would take it to Johanna and tell her that Andrintje was coming back to them, and beg her to forgive Aalst Vlokman before she came. Forgive, forgive . . . that was what she must say to Johanna.

She took up her letter from her lap, and with hands that trembled a little tore open the envelope. It did not seem to be a letter after all. It had no address, no date, and no beginning. The sheet upon which it was written was blotted and stained, and the ink had run, making reading for Jacoba still more difficult. Slowly she spelt out the first sentence, which began so strangely: "Tan' Coba, Tan' Coba, I have that to tell you that I cannot tell you," and ended in an unreadable blur.

What was her darling trying to tell her? What

was it? Suddenly she was filled with foreboding of disaster. Suddenly again her pain was upon her. But she must not give way to her pain. She must master it. She must read her letter. . . . Here now was something more that she could see—a few words standing out clear enough for her to spell. But such strange words! "Tan' Coba, is love then a sin?" A sin! A sin? What could her little Andrintje know of sin? What was it she had to tell? Our Father, our Father, was she going blind that she could not read the rest of her letter?

Her pain was now so intense that it was with difficulty that she did not scream aloud. But she did not scream. To scream would be to disgrace Johanna, and even in her anguish she must not disgrace Johanna. She must read her letter. . . . Here was another line—wait, wait, she must spell it out—"When I said to Mevrouw that I would go again to Harmonie she cried to me 'How can you think to go and shame your aunts before the world?'" Shame! Andrintje? . . . Was there more to read . . . ?

If there was more Jacoba was never to read it. Only one word did she see through the increasing darkness of her vision—the word "forgive." And with that word, bringing back Aalst Vlokman to her thoughts, her mind slipped into a sudden confusion of haste and anxiety. She must hurry.

She must run. Andrina and the Englishman, Klaartje and Aalst Vlokman—Johanna must forgive them all. All. There was no time to lose about this. If but a moment were lost it might be too late. Johanna must forgive. She must find Johanna. She must run. Forgive, forgive! That was what she must say. But how dark the orchard had grown! How close the trees were! Keeping her back, keeping her back. . . . And the pain round her heart. . . . No, no, she had no pain round her heart. She must forget it and run. . . . The gate! Our Father, our Father, where was the gate? And where was Andrina? They must find her, they must find her, Klaartje's Andrina. But the gate . . . where was the gate? And the bent wire hook that Aalst Vlokman had made for it? Would she never find it? Would they never find Andrina? Oh, they must find Andrina. . . . Johanna had but to forgive and they would find her. . . . Andrintje, Andrintje. . . . Johanna, Johanna! . . . Had she called? Was this Johanna coming to her from the soap-pot? Johanna running? . . .

Johanna caught her as she stumbled. "Coba, Coba," she cried. "What is it then, my Coosje?"

"Coosje" . . . Klaartje's name for her. . . . Had Johanna called her that after all these years? Coosje? Then she needn't run any more. She needn't run. . . . But still there was something

she had to say to Johanna. . . . What was it? what was it? This pain? No, no, not this pain. . . . Something else, something else. . . . She remembered now. . . . Forgive. . . . Andrintje . . . Aalst . . . Vlokman . . . forgive. . . .

She had said it. . . . Was this Johanna still calling to her? But Johanna had her in her arms. . . . Why then should she call to her from so far away? . . . And in the dark . . . the trees all closing in upon her . . . bringing the dark. . . .

IV

The mail which had brought Jacoba her letter from Andrina had brought also a letter to Mevrouw from her son Cornelius. Cornelius, like his wife, was no letter-writer, and Mevrouw had been as little disturbed by his silence of the last few weeks as she was now by the arrival of his letter. It lay unopened on the window-sill of the kitchen where, at that moment, she was busy with her last batch of cinnamon biscuits. When the biscuits were safely in the oven she would open it. And then, perhaps, she would know for certain, as at present she hoped, that Cornelius and his family, and Andrina with them, would be here in a day or two for the Thanksgiving. For her daughter-in-law was now

in good health and fit, she thought, to undertake the journey.

It was in the kitchen that, like Tan' Linda in the post-office, Mevrouw missed Andrina most, and it was of Andrina that she now began to think. Cornelius had said in one of his notes that Andrina had brought such comfort to his wife that he wished she might remain with them always. Yes, thought Mevrouw, as she rolled and cut her biscuits, but she herself was now growing old, and when Andrina returned to them she would, without shame, plead an old woman's selfishness and beg that the child should in future remain with her here. For she must admit—yes, the time had come at last for her to admit—that preparations such as these which now occupied her for the Thanksgiving were at last becoming a little heavy for her. Soon, of course, she would have Emerentia, as Frikkie's wife, to support her. But Frikkie and his wife were to have their own home. On this point she had been firm, and a house was already being built for them on a rise near the lower lands. Yes, though Harmonie would go in time to Frikkie as the youngest son, until that time came he and his wife must have no ties at the homestead which would interfere with the natural development of their young married life. Though family life among her people

might still be, to a large extent, patriarchal, with the older generation imposing its will upon the younger, to each of her sons and daughters in turn Alida van der Merwe had granted such freedom as this. Frikkie and his wife should not be robbed of it because, alas, she was now growing old. Emerentia should be mistress in her own house as she, Alida, with Andrina's help, should continue to be in hers. And not till his house was ready for him should Frikkie marry. Frikkie had rebelled a little at this delay, and Mevrouw smiled as she remembered it, but Emerentia, so full of sound common-sense, had herself urged its wisdom. With the same common-sense she had left the valley and the adoring Frikkie and returned to her parents to "get ready" her linen.

From Frikki Mevrouw's thoughts wandered naturally to the Englishman, for here too was marriage, but marriage already accomplished. News of this had reached her some weeks ago in a letter from the Englishman himself. It was to Mevrouw that he had written, but as he had written in English it was to Tan' Linda that the reading of his letter had fallen. And how strangely had Linda taken his news! As a rule nothing delighted her more than the news of a wedding, but when she read of the Englishman's she cried:

"No, what, Alida! The young man should have

told us now when he came to us that there was one that waited for him in England. Why did he not tell us? Does he not say in his letter that it was straight to her that he went when he left us here at Harmonie? Then he should have said to us at the beginning how it was with him. Yes, surely he should have done this, Alida!"

And when Mevrouw, smiling at her discontent, had asked: "Were you thinking then to find him a wife yourself?" Linda had answered unexpectedly:

"And why should I not have found him a wife? It was a good wife that I had found him, and well the young man knew it! No, what, laugh if you like, Alida, but there was one in this house that did not laugh when the young man went away!"

Yes, most astonishingly Linda had said that, and refused to say anything more. Well, thought Mevrouw, as the young man was now married there was perhaps nothing more to be said. . . . But could Linda indeed have thought seriously of Andrina for the Englishman? Surely Linda was wiser than that! Surely she was mistaken in thinking that Andrina had not been able to smile when he drove away. Surely, if the child had been unhappy, she, Alida, would have noticed it. . . . And she had noticed nothing . . . nothing. . . . Yet who could tell what lay in the

heart of another—even a child? Who could judge of another's joys and sorrows, hopes and fears—even a child's? It was God alone, to whom all were children, who could read the heart of a child. . . .

With her biscuits all cut in little stars and rounds ready for the oven, Mevrouw rubbed her hands on a clean white cloth and sat down on a chair near the window to read her son's letter. Cornelius wrote in the heavy burdened sentences to which the misery of having to wield a pen invariably reduced his thoughts. He had hoped, he said, to come down with his wife and children for the Thanksgiving, but he could not now do so. He had been in great trouble and so also had been his wife. Andrina had left them. She was with child, but would not name the father of her child, and could not look to him, she said, for help. For some time his wife had suspected how it was with her, but had not dared to believe it. And he himself had often said how the air of Caroline must surely be suiting her that she grew so plump. But at last his wife had spoken, and before they could think what was best to do for her in her sin Andrina had left them. At first they had thought it was back to Harmonie she had gone, for she had said to his wife that it was to her aunt Jacoba that she wished to go. When she said this his wife had asked her, as was surely right, how

could she think to go to Harmonie and shame her aunts before the world? But they knew now that it was not to Harmonie that she had gone, but up to the Losberg district, for old Hans Rademeyer who drove a wool-wagon between Caroline and Cortes had himself taken her so far on the way, and had come that day to tell them so. She had told Oom Hans that she was going to seek her father, Herman du Toit, in the Losberg district, and Hans had taken her to his sister at the toll-house on the Cortes-Losberg road. He himself, Cornelius, had long thought that Herman du Toit was dead, but old Hans Rademeyer had heard men speak of such a man in Losberg. However it was, Hans had left her with his sister at the toll-house and come to tell them so. As soon as Hans brought them further news he would write again, but he would leave it now to Mevrouw to say what was best to Andrina's aunts. It might be that they could say who, in the valley, was the father of her child. Jantje had cried himself into a fever when he found that Andrina was gone and spoke of her night and day.

All this did Mevrouw read sitting quietly in the window with tears trickling down her cheeks. Sorrow for her was not anguish, and sin brought her no horror. In both sin and sorrow she saw but the passing ills of those little children whose duty it was to love one another, and who, in sin

or in sorrow, were safe in the keeping of a compassionate Father. Sin would pass, sorrow would pass, but the compassion which had sent the Redeemer into the world to forgive and to heal—this would never pass.

So were her thoughts moving slowly to the slow, unnoticed tears of her serene and gentle old age when Classina October burst into the room.

"Mevrouw, Mevrouw!" she cried. "Down by the Steenkamp house they cry that Juffrouw Jacoba lies dead."

V

JACOBA was carried to her grave under the black cashmere shawl and buried close to the narrow mounds of earth under which lay old Piet Steenkamp and his wife. The news—so vague and yet so definite—in the letter which had been taken from her dead hand, and which the Field Cornet, to whom her death was reported, had found it his duty to read, spread quickly from hut to hut, from homestead to homestead, throughout the valley. Johanna, conscious of this, scorned all sympathy and faced her shame, as she faced her grief, alone. With a terrible majesty she followed the ladder which bore Jacoba to her grave, and from none who were gathered around that grave did she seek or would she acknowledge

any sign of pity. God Himself had dealt her this double blow, and proudly, in that sense of personal righteousness which was now her only support in life, she bore it.

Though circumstances had made the contents of Andrina's letter so generally known Johanna herself was one of the few with whom Mevrouw shared her son Cornelius's letter. Going down to the brown-walled house she read to Johanna there all that Cornelius had written. But sorrow for the dead had brought Johanna no pity for the living. Cold, calm, her head erect, she listened in silence to Mijnheer Cornelius's letter and then stated that she did not know the father of Andrina's child; that Andrina might spend the rest of her life searching for her own father in the Losberg district, but she would not find him there: and that if she returned to Harmonie it would be, as Mevrouw knew, to find her aunt Jacoba in the grave to which she had driven her.

These three statements Johanna made and then kept silence. Through that wall of pride and righteousness behind which she guarded so jealously her shamed and stricken soul Mevrouw was powerless to reach her. She must leave Johanna to God and to time. And to God and to time, serene in the conviction of their power to heal the wounds of pride and sorrow alike, she left her. Her concern now was all for Andrina. While

God and time were doing their work with Johanna, Andrina must be found and if possible brought home. Cornelius's wife had perhaps been a little hard in what she had said against the child's return to Harmonie. The young and happily married were often strangely hard on those who, less fortunate than themselves, erred for love. Cornelius's wife had not escaped this harshness. And if Andrina, alas, had sinned for love, was it not she, Alida van der Merwe, who all unwittingly had brought her into temptation? Was it not under her wing that the child had come to know—and to love—the Englishman?

She understood now the irritation shown by Tan' Linda over the young man's letter, though to none had the news that Andrina was to bear a child seemed so astounding and so unbelievable as it had done to Linda. Never before had any romance with which she had busied her cheerful and laughter-loving heart been marred by such frustration and tragedy as this. And in the vehemence of her instinctive rebellion against tragedy she had damned the Englishman and all his race. Mevrouw had not been able to judge the young man so hardly. For here again had she not been herself to blame? Was it not she who had made it easy for him—so gay, so idle, so pleasantly selfish—to find solace through his exile in Andrina's company? She could not believe, as

Tan' Linda in her irritation professed to believe, that the young man had foreseen tragedy and fled to England to escape his just share of it. She could not believe that he had known how it was with Andrina when he left her. That he had been selfish—yes: that he might be content never now to know how it was with Andrina: that he might indeed safeguard his conscience against the inconvenience of any curiosity on this point—this she was forced to admit was probable. For the young man was now married and what was done could not be undone, and these things happened and this was life. So did Mevrouw, returning sadly to the homestead, temper judgment with mercy for all.

Johanna's denial that she could name the father of Andrina's child could not perhaps be ranked as a lie, but it was not in the interest of truth that she had made it. Only by refusing thus to admit the Englishman for a moment into her thoughts could she hold her own against the imagined jeers of Aalst Vlokman the beadle. In those first bitter days which followed Jacoba's death and preceded the Thanksgiving she was haunted day and night by the memory of her triumph over Aalst Vlokman in his lands. From the very bitterness of this memory which, like an obsession, dulled even her sorrow for Jacoba, did she draw, in fact, her perilous strength. Aalst Vlokman might remem-

ber as she did all that had passed between them in the lands, but she would dare him by her silence and her pride to remind her of it. She would hold him at bay. She would give no ear, in her thoughts, to Jacoba's last broken cry as she lay in her arms. None but herself had heard it. None should know of it. Forgiveness as she understood it would be weakness. And if once she gave way to such weakness she was lost. Only by dominance could she live. With none now to dominate but the beadle, the beadle she must dominate. Strengthened thus she could face and quell that pity which she knew the coming Thanksgiving would bring her.

Of Johanna's feelings as they concerned himself the beadle was as ignorant as he was of the contents of Mevrouw's letter from her son. All his fears for Klaartje's child had now been realized, but in the shock of Jacoba's death he had accepted their realization with an apathy that took no thought of triumphs. That Andrina was to bear a child, and that neither she nor any other member of the Caroline family was now to be expected at Harmonie for the Thanksgiving, were the only facts beyond Jacoba's death that he seemed able to grasp. And he accepted both facts with an indifference which was perhaps the reaction to the intensity of his former fears. It was not Andrina, so far beyond his reach in the

Caroline district, who now held his thoughts. It was Jacoba, farther still beyond his reach, lying quiet in her grave.

All that he had been called upon to tell the Field Cornet of his share in the tragedy of Jacoba's death was that he had carried Andrina's letter down to the orchard and left Jacoba alone there to read it. But that his share was in fact greater than this he could not himself doubt. If after Jacoba's death it was Aalst Vlokman whom Johanna saw for ever jeering at her in his lands, it was Jacoba, her face drawn with pain, shrinking from him like a child he had struck with a whip, who haunted the beadle. As great as had been his exultation in that moment of cruelty was now his regret and remorse. It was he who, in his own eyes, had killed Jacoba. No longer now did he waste his time in his lands by gazing out across the world at nothing. He wasted it by creeping up from his lands to gaze like a man in a trance at the dry brown earth which hid Jacoba from his sight. And like a man in a trance did he make such preparations as were required of him as beadle for the coming Thanksgiving.

VI

For the Thanksgiving in the Aangenaam valley men, women and children journeyed to Harmonie as they had journeyed for the Sacrament in spring, and now, nine days after Jacoba's death, were encamped round the church preparing for the service that was to be held there at noon. The tragedy of Jacoba's death and the strange rumours about Andrina had stirred both men and women to a warmth of pity, of curiosity, of censure and amazement which, throughout the early morning, had drawn them in little eager groups to Jacoba's grave, and from that grave, in more daring ones and twos, to visit Johanna herself in the low mud house. In all that had befallen Johanna they saw clearly the finger of God. What they did not see so clearly, and what they were now most anxious to discover, was why the Lord had so sorely afflicted the most upright of old Piet Steenkamp's daughters. On this point, however, they gained no enlightenment from Johanna. For their pity, their curiosity, their censure and amazement she was prepared, and each in turn she quelled by the majesty of her silence. Even with the pastor did she maintain this silence, and he returned to Mevrouw at the homestead sorrowing for the righteous hardness of Johanna's

heart as he sorrowed for the erring weakness of Andrina's.

Baffled by this aloofness it was to Tan' Linda in the post-office that many of Johanna's visitors went next. But Tan' Linda knew of no secret sin for which Johanna deserved such punishment, and of Andrina all that she would say was that she had gone, as was surely natural, to her father, Herman du Toit, in the Losberg district. Here, for the curious, was another surprise. Had not Andrina, all these years, been known in the valley for an orphan?

"All the same," said Tan' Linda sharply, "it is to her father she has gone, and well I wish he would bring her back to me, for how now can I keep order in the post with all the world coming at once for news that I cannot give them and for letters that I cannot sort?" And she added in that irritation which was so foreign to her cheerful nature, but from which she had suffered in anxious moments ever since the arrival of the Englishman's letter:

"If there is more that you would know go you to Aalst Vlokman, the beadle. Has he not lived with the Steenkamps all these years?"

Few, she knew, among her visitors would care to tackle Aalst Vlokman, however great their thirst for information. But there was one, outside her reckoning, who did. Jan Beyers was now

a married man, and though marriage had not yet brought him that complete understanding of women for which he had hoped it had brought him a vigorous contempt for the bachelor. He who once before had dared to question the beadle about Andrina would dare, from his superior position in life, to question him again. And with deliberate bravado he sought him out.

The beadle was turning away from the trestle-table which he had put up in front of the church door for the thank-offerings of the women when Jan Beyers addressed him.

"Tell me, now, beadle," he said, plunging at once into his subject, "tell me now, you that once offered me two plough-oxen for Andrina du Toit, that men thought was an orphan—is it true that she has gone now to her father, Herman du Toit, in the Losberg district?"

Strange as had been the young man's first question to him in spring, it had brought him no surprise. Now, for the first time since Jacoba's death, he was roused from his apathy to so intense and sudden an amazement and anxiety that he cried out as if in pain:

"Who says it?"

"No, what, beadle," answered Jan Beyers, withdrawing slightly, married man though he was, from the bachelor Aalst Vlokman, "no, what! Juffrouw de Neysen says it. Up in the post-office.

To many of us there she has said it. Is it not then true, beadle?"

In a voice of such bitter contempt that it robbed the young man of whatever support his married state had hitherto afforded him, Aalst Vlokman answered:

"And what is it to you, Jan Beyers, whether or no Andrina du Toit has gone to her father in the Losberg district? Are you not now a married man with a sewing-machine?"

He waited for no reply but turned, contemptuous still, and went up to the low mud house. Here, in the living-room, he found Johanna packing the thank-offering of candles and soap, which Jacoba had helped her to make, into a large shallow basket, which she was about to carry down to the church.

"Johanna," he said, "this that they say in the church land—that Andrina has gone to Herman du Toit in the Losberg district—is it true?"

"It is true."

"But, Johanna . . . !"

"What then, Aalst Vlokman," said Johanna coldly. "Mijnheer Cornelius has written it in a letter to Mevrouw. Klaartje's child has gone in her sin to look for her father in the Losberg district."

"Johanna!"

"'Johanna, Johanna'!" cried Johanna sharply.

"What is it then you would say? That Klaartje's child will not find her father in the Losberg district? Is that what you would say? But where then shall she look for him? Would you have her come here where Jacoba lies now in her grave for the shame that Andrina, like Klaartje, brought her?"

"Johanna . . . !"

"'Johanna, Johanna'!" cried Johanna again. "'Johanna, Johanna.' Is there no other word in the world for you to cry but 'Johanna,' Aalst Vlokman?"

The beadle did not answer, nor did he see how Johanna trembled with the violence of her emotion. She had no thought now of the Englishman, no fear now that Aalst Vlokman would remind her of her false triumph in his lands. Her present triumph was complete. Yet as the beadle turned and left her she went quickly into her room and kneeling down by the bed which for so many years she had shared with Jacoba burst suddenly into tears.

Out in the winter sunshine the beadle, like a drunken man, moved slowly forward, halted and moved forward again, and found himself at last back in the church-land. Here now all was movement, and the quiet hum of a serious content. From their tents and wagons men and women were carrying their gifts to the straight white

paths which went round the church or to the long trestle-table, covered with a white cloth, in front of the church door. Pumpkins, corn, dried fruits, mealies, goats, geese and poultry—these were the thank-offerings of the men, while on the table were spread the baked meats and cakes, the custards and pies and preserves, the candles and soap, and little hand-made garments for children brought by the women. After the service of Thanksgiving all these would be sold and the money placed on the table as an offering to the Lord. And to-morrow would bring the Sacrament and after it men would return again to labour in their lands until the spring. But it was neither of the Sacrament nor of the Thanksgiving that the beadle thought as he made his way through the little crowd. It was of Klaartje's Andrina seeking for her father, Herman du Toit, in the Losberg district. In all that he had feared for the child this he had never feared, and of this he had never dreamed. . . .

He had passed without greeting through the little gathering round the table and had slipped unnoticed into the doorway of the empty church when Jafta, at a nod from Mijnheer, began ringing the bell. As its gay clear jangle rang out into the crisp winter air men and women gathered in separate groups on each side of the pastor, and Johanna, coming late with her basket and looking

neither to right nor to left, joined the women near the table. The bell ceased, and with the beadle still in the doorway the service began. A prayer was offered. A psalm was sung. And the pastor began his address.

To the prayer, the psalm, and the opening of the pastor's address, the beadle listened as one might listen to an unknown language spoken in a dream. But suddenly he realized, from the quick surreptitious glances cast at Johanna by both men and women alike, that the pastor was touching upon the tragedy of Jacoba's death. Yet when he strained his ears to hear, and his mind to grasp, what it was that the pastor was saying of Jacoba, he heard only:

"My little children, speak no evil of the living if you would praise the dead. To judge is not for us. Seek each of you forgiveness for his own sin, grant each of you forgiveness for the sins of others—God Himself has commanded it. Is there one of us that is without sin? Let him that would listen to the evil that is spoken of another acknowledge first the evil that is within himself, and who then will dare to listen? Who then will dare to speak?"

So much the beadle heard, and knew it to refer not to Jacoba but to Andrina. And coming out from the doorway, standing alone on the wide stone step, he cried like a man possessed:

"Mijnheer! If they would judge Andrina let them first judge me! If evil be spoken of her let it first be spoken of me. What is Andrina's sin to mine? It is not for Andrina's shame that Jacoba lies now in her grave. It is for mine. I that was to have married Jacoba took from her sister Klaartje that which she would not give me and Klaartje's child is mine. Afterwards, when Herman du Toit found how it was with her, he left her. Klaartje died for my sin when our child was born. And Jacoba died the day that I would not stay in the orchard to read Andrina's letter with her but asked her what was Klaartje's child to me."

Having spoken he swung round on the step and re-entered the church, leaving behind him a strange fluttering silence, broken by Mevrouw's moving quickly to Johanna's side and by the pastor's saying quietly: "My children, let us pray."

VII

In all but her household duties had Andrina, up in the Caroline district at Mijnheer Cornelius's sheep-farm of Uitkijk, found herself in a world that was new and strange to her. Here were no mountains and rocky aloed slopes, no fertile lands and brown streams, no poplar groves and orchards. The homestead—a bare white-

washed building—stood in the open veld and within sight of it was neither green land nor green tree. Look where one would, north, south, east or west, one saw only mile after mile of kopjes and stones and little brown bushes sweeping across the plain to meet the distant sky. Here and there a farm-house was gathered into this rhythmic monotony, but no farm-house could break it. Calm and indifferent as the peace of God the Great Karoo absorbed both man and the labour of man as things of naught.

To Andrina, who all her life since infancy had lived in the narrow Aangenaam valley shut in between the Teniquota mountains and the Aangenaam hills, there was at first something overpowering and desolating in this vast expanse of earth and sky, this ruthless monotony of nature. Yet she came quickly to find in it a sense of her own insignificance which at once consoled and upheld her. If she were indeed as insignificant as at some moments in this space and stillness she felt herself to be, of what account were her joys and her sorrows, her hopes and her fears? Of what account was time that came from eternity but to pass so quickly into eternity again? Of what account were love and anguish?

So, at such moments, would her thoughts run, and so, for a moment, would the peace of an indifferent God be hers. But there were days and

nights when peace brought her no solace and reason no courage, and when all knowledge lay for her in the single fact that her dear Arry, her dear, dear love, had left her.

In those lonely days and those sleepless nights she would turn for comfort to the small English grammar which, with a picture-book for Jantje, had come to her from a bookseller's in Cape Town. On the fly-leaf was written: "To his pupil Andrina from the Englishman—in the hope that she will forget and regret nothing that he has taught her." This, with the date, was the only line of greeting she had had from him, and she knew that she would have no other and that it was best that she should have no other. He had gone from her for ever, and it was right that he should go, right that he should cease to think of her, though she should never cease to think of him. All this she knew, yet every weekly post brought her the sharp pang of hope. To every passing wagon did her heart, outstripping reason, rush forth in welcome. In every stranger who came about the farm did she seek, like an expectant child, the face she loved. And with this secret burden of hope that was never to be fulfilled went the terrifying burden of a jealousy she could not master—an anguish that chained her love to self, and made of memory a torture.

Nothing in her sorrow was so terrible to An-

drina as this. Here alone, in her jealousy of this unknown woman whom her dear Arry loved, was she conscious of sin. Fight against it as she might the woman whom the Englishman loved was the one human being for whom she could feel no tenderness and to whom she could not be just. Night after night did she kneel by the side of her bed crying to a pitiful Father to cleanse her heart of this stain. It was to her in some way a betrayal of her love for the Englishman and the only evil thing which that love had brought her. For nothing else did she seek forgiveness or feel that she needed it. But tenderness was long in coming and Andrina had cried herself to sleep through many nights of shame before it came, suddenly and unexpectedly, with the knowledge that she was to bear a child.

It was, perhaps, because all her life she had been healthy and incurious that Andrina accepted the vague discomforts of recent months as she had accepted those earlier mysteries of her slowly developing body—without question. The Englishman had made her body beautiful to her, a glorious possession which, in her poverty and humility, had seemed to her the only gift her love had to offer. And of nothing beyond the joy of giving had she thought. Arry had declared that no harm should befall her, but of "harm" as a consequence of her love she had never dreamed.

Nor when, shortly before he left, in one of those spells of silence which were to her the quiet of a deep content, he had asked her unexpectedly: "You're sure you're all right, Andrina?" had she thought of his concern as referring to anything but her happiness in being with him. She had assured him then that she was "all right" and quiet only because she was so happy. And he, tilting up her chin and smiling down upon her, had said gravely: "I want you to be all right, you know. You must keep so." Never again, in the short time that remained to them, had she allowed her silence to trouble him. The Englishman had left her with as little suspicion as she herself had of the secret which Mevrouw Cornelius's talk so casually disclosed to her.

It was on a hot, still, moonlit night that knowledge came to her. Mijnheer Cornelius had gone from home for the night and she was sitting by Mevrouw's side sewing by lamp-light. Mevrouw, a young woman with whose devotion to her husband and children went a strong sense of her own importance and the importance of her ailments, was speaking freely, as was her custom to a sympathetic listener, of her various illnesses. One of the most serious of these had been at the birth of her second child, who had lived but a few hours. After this illness she had feared that Jantje might never have the little sister for whom he was con-

stantly begging, and she spoke now, with a self-absorbed interest, of her hopes and fears at that time, her expectations and alarms, her cares and precautions, and of the signs by which at last she had known for a certainty that she was with child with Magdalena. Andrina, sitting quietly by her side, listened to her talk with a wildly beating heart and trembling limbs.

When Mevrouw at last settled down for the night Andrina went at once to her own room. Here she slipped quickly out of her clothes and, standing in the moonlight, looked down upon her body. . . . This, then, was how it was with her! This, then, was the explanation of her own vague discomforts, her occasional faintness and nausea!

Very slowly she put on her long plain cotton nightgown and sat down on the edge of her bed. What was it that she felt? She did not know. Amazement, terror, joy and sadness—her heart held them all. Shame she did not feel. The child she bore within her was not for her the sign and the seal of her sin, but the sign and the seal of her love. As once she had gathered her dear Arry into her arms so now she gathered his unborn child to her heart—in an infinite and courageous tenderness. What was it that Christ had said to His disciples? "I will not leave you comfortless." What made her think of this now? She did not know. Christ as the Son of God meant nothing

to her, yet suddenly His tenderness meant everything and her own troubled heart answered to it with a tenderness that embraced even the Englishwoman for whose sake her child must for ever be fatherless. The burden of her jealousy was lifted from her. Never again, with that shame and burden gone and with this more precious burden of her love in its place, could she be comfortless.

For the future she felt strangely little concern. Nothing that the future held for her could mean such anguish as had been her parting from Arry, or such horror as had been her jealousy of the woman whom he loved. As her Heavenly Father had helped her through these sorrows so would He help her in all that lay before her. Her only definite desire was to go home to her aunt Jacoba. Only with Tan' Coba could she share this new and terrifying secret which brought her at once such sadness and such joy, which made her at once so courageous and so tremulous.

VIII

Andrina's desire to return to her aunt Jacoba at Harmonie was not to be fulfilled. When first she ventured timidly to speak of it her suggestion was met by protests from all alike. Jantje, bursting into tears, flung himself upon her to hold her fast. Mevrouw, astounded that

she should be thought well enough to be left, and grieved that so useful a person as Andrina should think of leaving her, could only cry: "But what then!" It was Mijnheer Cornelius who spoke. Why, he asked, should Andrina be so anxious to leave them when their need of her was still so great, and when all could see how much better and stronger, taller even as well as broader, she herself had grown since she came to them? Let her stay until the time of the winter Thanksgiving and they would all then, if things went well, go down to Harmonie together and prove to Ou-ma there that for some at least the air of the Great Karoo was a better medicine than the air of the Aangenaam valley. For, he must say it now, he had thought Andrina looked really ill when he met her and Jantje with his father at Malgas.

Thus for the moment, with her duty made clear to Andrina, was the matter settled.

That, since her arrival in the Caroline district, Andrina had grown taller as well as broader was true, yet even now, in her slow development, she had not reached the fullness of figure common to Dutch girls of her age. Her secret thus remained her secret for long after it might otherwise have been guessed—and of Andrina—so timid and so gentle—by whom would such a secret have been quickly guessed? Her unselfishness also helped

her to guard it. At Harmonie her love for the Englishman had made her not less considerate of others but more so. At Uitkijk her tenderness for her unborn child did the same. Her child was her constant secret care, yet Jantje and Magdalena were but the dearer to her for it. In tending them it was he whom she tended, in comforting them it was he whom she comforted.

To the future, in her fatalism or her faith, she gave, as always, strangely little thought, and for it she made no definite plans. Her one desire was still to return to her aunt Jacoba. Beyond this she dared not let her thoughts travel, lest they should travel too far and bring her again to the anguish of loneliness, of longing, or of jealousy. Nor could she trust herself to write even to Tan' Coba of what lay in her heart. Her secret must remain her secret until she could whisper it into Tan' Coba's ear. And by some calculation based on talk of Mevrouw's about months and moons it seemed to her that if Thanksgiving fell early this year her secret would be safe until she reached Harmonie with Mijnheer and Mevrouw and the children.

Her secret, however, was not so safe as she had thought. It happened that, to suit the convenience of the pastor, the Thanksgiving at Harmonie was this year to be late. And as days slipped by into weeks and weeks slipped on to-

wards months there came a time when, in spite of the careful letting out and letting down of her dresses in her own room by candle-light at night, Mevrouw began to watch her with a startled and steadily increasing uneasiness. Andrina! Andrina with child! . . . She could not, and for long she would not, believe it.

To Antoinette van der Merwe—so comfortably married, so sure of the affection of her husband and her children, so sure, in every way of herself—no sin was so great as that from which, as a wife and mother, she felt herself to be secure. In this matter, above all others, good was good to her and evil was evil, and a woman was either one or the other. Yet here in Andrina—who was so useful to her in the house: whose bread, she remembered with amazement, was so excellent: who was so quick and capable and quiet in all she did—in Andrina with this evil of evils went a natural goodness of heart that there was no denying, and that became, in some way which she could not properly define, a threat to her own moral security. It was this, perhaps, that betrayed her into that harshness feared by Mevrouw at Harmonie, when, about a month before the proposed journey of the family to the Thanksgiving her suspicions were at last confirmed. She was not by nature a cruel woman, but on that occasion her bewilderment, her unaccustomed

feeling of insecurity, and, though she herself might not have realized it, her sense of personal grievance at the coming loss of so useful a help as Andrina, made her one. Had Andrina baked less well Mevrouw Cornelius might have been kinder. As it was, on that fateful night, with everything that Andrina said, and with everything that she herself said, she grew harder. And all that was said seemed afterwards strange and unreal to her, with consequences out of all proportion to her intentions.

It was the accidental oversetting of a chair which led Mevrouw to speak. Andrina, having brushed awkwardly against it in passing, stooped to pick it up, and having done so found Mevrouw's gaze significantly upon her. For a moment there was silence. Then Antoinette, putting down her work and pushing it aside on the table, asked coldly:

"And what now, Andrina?"

"Mevrouw?"

"What now," repeated Mevrouw, her heart beginning to beat more quickly. "What now, Andrina, when all the world can see at last how it is with you? What now will you do in your shame?"

At Mevrouw Cornelius's tone, into which there was creeping the eagerness of virtue, Andrina flushed and her eyes filled slowly with tears. "If Mevrouw can spare me," she began, speaking very low. . . .

"Spare you," cried Antoinette in amazement. "And do you think then that I would not long ago have spared you had I known how it was with you? Do you think then, Andrina, that I can keep you knowing now how it is with you—you that have sinned in the eyes of the Lord?"

"If Mevrouw cannot keep me—and I will not ask her to keep me—I will go now to Harmonie."

Again Antoinette van der Merwe was amazed. "To Harmonie!" she cried. "To Harmonie! How can you think to go to Harmonie and shame your aunts before the world? How can you think to go to Harmonie and shame Mevrouw that had made you like a child of her own in the house and that had herself made you ready to join the church? Have you no shame for yourself or your sin, Andrina?"

Andrina, whose shame had been her jealousy, at that sharp reminder of it began to tremble. "If I cannot go to Harmonie," she said, "where shall I go?"

"No," answered Mevrouw, speaking as virtue triumphant, "that is for you to say—or the father of your child. Ask him, Andrina. Has he not shared your sin?"

"I cannot ask him, Mevrouw."

"You cannot? You cannot? Who is he then, that you cannot ask him?"

"I cannot name him, Mevrouw."

"And again you cannot? Is your child then the son of God that his father cannot be named?"

"Mevrouw," cried Andrina imploringly, "Mevrouw!"

Antoinette, horrified herself by what she had said, unable to guess what had made her say it, drew her work suddenly towards her and began nervously, blindly, to stitch. When at length she looked up Andrina had gone. Well, she would not go after her. To-morrow she would arrange with Cornelius what had best be done. God forgive her, why had she asked Andrina that? And God forgive Andrina, but where would she, Antoinette, again find some one who could bake such good bread?

As she pondered over these things she heard in the distance old Hans Rademeyer's wagon coming to a halt by the roadside to outspan.

Andrina, in the darkness of her own room, heard it too.

IX

HANS RADEMEYER—a cheerful, simple, kindly old man—made his living by driving a wool-and-transport wagon between the township of Cortes, where there was at that time a wool-washery, and the surrounding sheep-farming districts. On the Cortes-Caroline jour-

ney Uitkijk was one of his outspans, and here Jantje was his most particular friend. When the wagon came by day it was hailed always by the small boy with tumultuous delight, and he would spend hours with Oom Hans, listening to his talk, sharing his jokes, trying to crack his long bamboo whip, and boasting to him of his granfather's farm at Harmonie. It was to confirm an astonishing statement about the size and magnificence of the Harmonie wagon-house that, on Oom Hans's first visit after Jantje's return, Andrina was called down to the wagon. And it was then that, on learning her name, the old man had mentioned casually that in the Losberg district he had heard men talk of one Herman du Toit who was said to come from Platkops dorp. This, he said, would surely be a relation of Andrina's? But, no, Jantje assured him with pride. Andrina was an orphan, with neither father nor mother, neither sister nor brother, neither uncle nor cousin, but two aunts only, Johanna and Jacoba, in all the world.

Hans Rademeyer never again mentioned the name of Herman du Toit, but Andrina pondered long upon it. Of her father's people she knew nothing. She had accepted their non-existence as she had accepted the fact that she was motherless. Once she had asked Tan' Coba where her father had died, and when Tan' Coba hesitated in her

reply Tan' Johanna had answered sharply for her "Up-country." There had been something in Johanna's tone as she said this that had made her answer final. And final it had been until Hans Rademeyer had awakened her curiosity. Surely there had not been two Herman du Toits in Platkops dorp? And if not, surely this must be her father who had died up-country?

So she had sometimes thought, and with the rumble of Oom Hans's wagon-wheels breaking in upon her distress as she sat alone in the darkness of her own room this thought became a dawning hope. Never before had she been called upon to make any decision concerning her own future. Always her fate had been settled for her by those whom she loved, or by her love for them. Now, with no guidance but a despair in which she still clung to the belief that a Heavenly Father would not forsake her, she took the only course that seemed open to her. She would go to the Losberg district with old Hans Rademeyer and seek out this Herman du Toit who might be her father.

Two hours later Andrina crept out of the silent house carrying a letter which she had written to Tan' Coba and her clothing in a small bundle. When she reached the wagon she found the old man asleep by the side of it. She did not wake him but climbed in quietly with her bundle and sat down on the floor under the half-tent. The tent-

flap was down at the back, and at the front some sacks of wool hid her from view. In her own room she had felt shaken and ill, and the letter she had written to Tan' Coba, and which she meant to post somewhere on the way, had been blotted with her tears. But gradually here, safe in old Oom Hans's wagon, under the starlit sky, she grew quiet and calm.

She had fallen into a light doze before the inspanning began and throughout it she remained silent and hidden. Nor did she speak after the wagon began to move slowly forward. The movement soothed her into a sense of security. For generations her people had found security in their wagons, and for generations had the women of her race, homeless but for their wagons, borne their children kneeling on the ground behind them. Gentle as she was Andrina was not without this power of endurance, this unself-conscious courage.

She had fallen again into a doze and the wagon had journeyed for several hours when she awoke to find Oom Hans peering down upon her over the wool-sacks.

"Our Father," said the old man, in a low undertone of amazement. "Our Father, our Father!" And then he asked, as if Andrina might but that moment have descended from the sky, "Have you been here long, then, Andrintje?"

"I came when Oom Hans was outspanned by the farm," said Andrina quickly. "I would have spoken to Oom Hans, but he slept. I would not wake him, and afterwards I also slept. I came to ask Oom Hans to take me with him to the Losberg district, where I go now to seek my father."

And she added tremulously, addressing him now directly in the second person: "You will take me, Oom Hans?"

"Surely I will take you, my child. But tell me now why is it that you wish to go? And are you not then an orphan as Jantje said?"

"I do not know," answered Andrina, breathing quickly. "It was said always that my father had died up-country, but surely now this Herman du Toit that you spoke of to me once must be he."

"But, Andrintje, if this Herman is your father why did he not long ago seek you out, and why do you now seek for him?"

Andrina, suddenly, without warning, began to cry. "Oom Hans," she whispered, "can you not see how it is with me? Mevrouw said she could no longer keep me at Uitkijk, and that to Harmonie I must not go. Where then should I go but to seek my father if he still lives?"

"Our Father," said the old man again. "Our Father!" His tone was at once so compassionate and so full of a tender amazement that Andrina's tears started afresh. "Oom Hans will not turn

me out of his wagon?" she cried. "He will take me with him?"

"But surely I will take you with me! Why should I not take you?"

"Because of my sin that Mevrouw says is so great," answered Andrina very low.

"And if I let none that have sinned travel in my wagon who then would travel in it, Andrintje? Our Father!"

For a time he was silent, while the oxen, guided by the Hottentot voorlooper, moved steadily forward. He was troubled, not about Andrina's presence in his wagon or her confession of sin, but about the reputation of this Herman du Toit in the Losberg district, whom she sought to claim as a father. On a recent journey into Losberg he had heard much evil of him, and it was for this reason that he had never again mentioned his name to the girl. Now it seemed to him that Andrina, whether his daughter or not, must be saved from a meeting with him. In some other way must help be found for her. Mevrouw had been hard, surely, in what she had said, but it was not for him to judge Mevrouw. It was for him to do what he could for the child who had trusted him. And surely he would do it.

"Look now, Andrina," he said at last. "Up on the Cortes road that runs to Losberg lives my sister Trintje that keeps the toll-house. To her I

will take you so soon as my work is done, and afterwards we will see how it goes. What say you, Andrina?"

What was there for Andrina to say? Once again was the care of a Heavenly Father made manifest to her. Once again, in the tenderness of this old man, was the tenderness of Christ made real to her.

"Take me where you will," she said. "Was it not God that sent you to me?"

X

When Aalst Vlokman, having solved at last for both Tan' Linda and Jan Beyers the mystery of his two plough-oxen, left the gathering at the church door he passed through the church to the vestry and made his way from there to the old Steenkamp house. Here in the living-room all was as it had always been—the well-scrubbed yellow-wood table in the middle of the room: the four stink-wood chairs strung with thongs of leather standing against the walls: the bucket-bench close to the door with its buckets and dipper: the unglazed wall-cupboard on the shelves of which, in an order that never varied, were ranged the cups and plates in daily use: the round table in the corner where, from a bright blue china vase, an ostrich feather drooped

over old Piet Steenkamp's big Bible: and on the wall above the feather a clock in a wooden case like a church, with a water-mill painted on the glass door beneath the dial—Aalst Vlokman saw them all as every day for fourteen years he had seen them. The noisy ticking of the clock was the only sound which broke the stillness of that little room to which, under Johanna's rule, neither death nor disaster could bring disorder.

For a moment the beadle gazed at this familiar orderliness then crossed the room and entered his bedroom. Here he opened his wagon-chest and took from it a small bag, made of kidskin, which had once held dried fruit and which now held his savings. This he slipped into his coat pocket. From the chest he took also a small bundle of clothing and a twist of tobacco, and having secured his belongings left the house, regardless of those who might see him from the church-land, and took the Platkops road from the west.

For some time, as if with the burden which had been lifted from his heart a burden had also been lifted from his body, the beadle's pace was a rapid one. There was no indecision now in his movements. His way lay as clear before him as did the straight grey road by which he took it. Only when he reached that point from where one caught the last glimpse of Harmonie before it was hidden by a spur of the hills did he turn and look

back. There lay the old gabled homestead with its green lands by the river: there lay the square white church, with round about it the tents and wagons of those who had come to share in the Thanksgiving: there lay old Piet Steenkamp's low mud house, and the Jew-woman's store, and the poplar grove, bare now of leaves and grey in the winter sunshine. In a little cluster between the Teniquota mountains and the Aangenaam hills they lay, and bitter as he had found life here no spot on earth was so dear to him as this. Yet now he knew that never again could he return to it. In confessing his sin before the church door he had cut himself off for ever from the lands which he had worked for Mijnheer as bijwoner: from the church where he had served the Lord as beadle: and from the low mud house in which, by threats of the exposure of Klaartje's disgrace, he had compelled Johanna to accept him as a lodger so that he might watch over his child Andrina.

That Mijnheer might wish him to return to his lands: that the pastor might wish him to return to the church: that Johanna, robbed of every support for her pride, might come in time, slowly and painfully, to yield that forgiveness for which Jacoba had pleaded so long in vain—these were possibilities which did not then exist for the beadle though the future might hold them. He saw him-

self now only as an outcast, and all his thought, all his care, was for the child of his sin who was now also an outcast. To her he was going. All the care that for fourteen years he had wished to shower upon her should now be hers. With the savings of those years in his little kidskin bag he had enough to provide for her immediate needs. And with the strength of his still vigorous body he would labour for her and for her child in whichever part of the country they could find a home. God who had refused all his sacrifices with his sin unconfessed would surely now, for the sake of His Son, the Redeemer of the world, take pity on him and grant him this.

To the Englishman he gave but little thought. Though he was the father of Andrina's child the Englishman had, in fact, ceased to exist for Aalst Vlokman. His feelings there, once so acute, and so near to the madness of jealousy and fear, had changed, he could not say how, to indifference. The young man had returned to his own country and married there. And in that far distance he prayed that God might keep him. That Andrina might still love him—this he knew was possible, and to this, in that it meant suffering for the child, he could not be indifferent. But the feeling uppermost in his mind was that neither Johanna nor the Englishman would ever again have power to come between him and Klaartje's child.

To her he was going. With all the speed in his power he would seek her out in the Losberg district and save her from Herman du Toit. What was it that he had said to Jacoba in the orchard? "What is Klaartje's child to me?" God forgive him that he had asked Jacoba that, and God forgive him the evil he had done Jacoba, but all the world had learned from him now what Klaartje's child was to him. And to her he was going.

Swinging round again and turning, as it seemed to him, his back upon Harmonie farm for ever, the beadle resumed his rapid steady walk.

XI

WHILE the beadle was making his way up-country on foot, Andrina was already safe in the keeping of old Tan' Trintje at the toll-house on the Cortes-Losberg road. Here, after a fortnight's journeying, Hans Rademeyer had brought her, and here he had left her, returning himself at once to Caroline with a load from Cortes-dorp. Andrina was to remain with Tan' Trintje until he was free to take her himself into the Losberg district. This he had begged of her as his only thanks for bringing her so far on her way.

With the old man in his wagon Andrina had come nearer to happiness than she had been since

the Englishman left her. The weather was fine and clear, the nights sharp with cold, the days brilliant with winter sunshine. For many days before reaching the mountainous country of the Cortes district it was across the plain of the Great Karoo that they journeyed, and more and more did Andrina come to feel what she had felt at Uitkijk —her insignificance in this space and stillness and the strange solace that this knowledge of her insignificance brought her. And because the old transport driver shared that simplicity which in Andrina the Englishman had taken for courage their position had no embarrassments for either of them. Oom Hans's tenderness and care for her were as natural as they were beautiful. And to the old man Andrina opened her heart as she could have opened it to no one else but her aunt Jacoba.

As she sat by his side in the slowly-moving wagon Oom Hans would sometimes question her about her people at Harmonie—her aunts Johanna and Jacoba, Mevrouw and Mijnheer van der Merwe, Juffrouw de Neysen at the post-office and the pastor from Platkops dorp. All these, with Aalst Vlokman the beadle, were known to him through Jantje. There was also, he said one day, an Englishman that Jantje had spoken much of. Did Andrina know him too?

"Yes," said Andrina, very low.

"Where is he now?" asked the old man. "Back again in his own country?"

"Yes," said Andrina.

"And married as Jantje said?"

Andrina nodded, biting her lips to keep them from trembling while tears trickled unnoticed down her cheeks.

The old man murmured, not looking at her now but gazing far ahead, "Cry then, my little one! Cry then! For women it is good."

But Andrina did not cry long. Mastering her emotion she touched his arm and said: "Oom Hans! It was right for him to go to the woman that he loved."

"Surely," agreed the old man. "But you also loved him, Andrintje—is it not so?"

"How could I help but love him?" cried Andrina. "How could I help but love him?"

For a long time they were silent, then again the girl spoke. "Oom Hans," she said, her voice low and troubled, "look how it is. I cannot help it, but even if it is a sin as Mevrouw Cornelius said, I am glad that it is as it is with me! Oom Hans, Oom Hans! Look how it was. . . . At first I could not give him up in my heart to the woman that he loved. Full of hate and bitterness was my heart towards her and nowhere could I fly from it . . . nowhere could I fly from it! Oom Hans, Oom Hans, that was my sin. That was my sin!

And always it was there till the night that I knew how it was with me. But that night I could no longer hate her. That night it was as if she must also be dear to me. . . . Tell me now . . . to be glad, even if it be a sin as Mevrouw Cornelius says, for that which brought peace to my heart . . . is this also a sin?"

The old man, taking off his wide-brimmed hat, peered into the crown of it as if he might find there the answer to Andrina's riddle. "Look now," he said at last, "for every sin there is pain, and for every sin there is sorrow. But when one comes at last through the pain and the sorrow to peace, surely that peace is the peace of God. Surely it is so, my child. Surely it is so."

This was all his wisdom. This was all his comfort. But for Andrina it sufficed.

From Tan' Trintje at the toll-house, when Hans Rademeyer left her there, it was a different comfort and a different wisdom that Andrina drew for her needs. The old woman had much of her brother's kindliness, and to her as to him it seemed perfectly natural that the girl should remain for the present in her care. But it was of months and moons that she spoke, and of Andrina's coming physical ordeal—not of the sorrows and the solace of her heart. And under her guidance Andrina was kept busy making the small garments which might soon now, it seemed to her, be needed.

The toll-house, where for many years Tan' Trintje had lived with her husband and where, after his death, she had continued to live with an old coloured woman to help her in the house, and a coloured boy to till her lands, was a small stone building on one of the passes by which the road from Cortes makes its way through mountainous country into the Losberg district. Cortes-dorp lay down in the valley where ran the clear stream which made its wool-washery famous. From the toll-house one looked down upon it as upon a small green island in the centre of a wide grey lake.

For those who lived at the toll-house there was no neighbour nearer than Cortes-dorp, and for company only those who, passing by on the road, rested for an hour on their journey. Andrina was shy of such company and seldom appeared, but for Oom Hans's wagon she kept constant watch. A month or more had passed before, early one afternoon, the old man returned to them.

Oom Hans had outspanned, and Andrina had carried his coffee out to him to the bench in front of the house when, sitting down by his side, she said shyly:

"Why is Oom Hans so quiet? Has he nothing to say to me? It is long that I've looked for his wagon!"

The old transport-driver drew her hand into his and looked down upon her with that tender and

compassionate smile which made his tanned and weather-beaten face a beautiful one.

"I have much to say to you, my Andrintje," he said. "Look now! When I came the second time by Uitkijk there had come a letter from Mevrouw at Harmonie to her son. Mevrouw wrote that he must do all that he could to find you for her, for there was none outside her own family who was dearer to her than you."

"Mevrouw wrote that?" cried Andrina in wonder. "Are you sure then, Oom Hans? Was that surely in her letter?"

"As surely as was the rest," said the old man.

"And what then was the rest?" asked Andrina.

For a moment Hans Rademeyer hesitated. Then he said gently: "Look now, Andrintje! Your aunt Jacoba is dead. It was a disease of the heart that she had. Running up from the orchard to your aunt Johanna—so it was that she died."

Andrina's hand, held in his own, began to tremble. He held it closer.

"Why did she run!" she asked, without reason, as it seemed to herself. "Why did she run?"

Again the old man hesitated. Why had she asked this strange unreasonable question, and why did she, looking at him almost in anger, repeat it?

"Look now, my little one," he said at last. "It

was with your letter in her hand that she ran. Aalst Vlokman had taken it to her in the orchard. So it was written in the letter that Mevrouw sent to her son."

The hand within his own was struggling as if to get free, but still he held it fast.

"What is it then, Oom Hans?" whispered Andrina fearfully. "What is it then that you have yet to tell me?"

"My little heart-thief! . . . Was it known to you that your aunt Jacoba was long ago to have married Aalst Vlokman the beadle?"

"Aalst Vlokman! But, Oom Hans . . ."

"Look now! All that I tell you was in the letter that Mevrouw at Harmonie wrote to her son at Uitkijk. Aalst Vlokman that should have married your aunt Jacoba came instead to love her sister Klaartje. Herman du Toit is not your father, my child, and God be praised that he is not, for in all the Losberg district there is no man that speaks well of him. In the Aangenaam valley this was known only to your aunts and the beadle himself, but on the day of the Thanksgiving, that was a week after your aunt Jacoba died, when men spoke of that which was in your letter to your aunt Jacoba, and would have judged you for it —then it was that the beadle made known to all, before the church door, the wrong that he had done. It was for you that he did it, Andrintje.

So that he himself might be judged before others judged you. And when he had done it, and all stood by in silence, he left the church and no man has seen him since. . . ."

As he spoke Andrina's hand had grown more and more restless and now it began to work suddenly in such spasms that he cried in alarm:

"What is it then, Andrintje? What is it then? Cry, my little one. To cry, for women, is good."

But Andrina did not cry. She gave a moan that ended unexpectedly in an agonized scream. Tan' Trintje, running out of the house, turned and called sharply to the old coloured woman within:

"Spread out the skin on the floor, Ophelia!"

Late that night, kneeling on the skin on the floor as many women of her race had knelt on the ground behind their wagons, Andrina bore her son.

XII

THREE weeks later, with spring in the air and peach-orchards in blossom down in the Cortes valley, Aalst Vlokman, making his way on foot from Cortes-dorp to Losberg, passed the toll-house on the mountain-side. At a little distance from the house, on bushes close by the roadside, Ophelia had spread out a wash-

ing to dry, and here it was that suddenly the beadle came to a halt. In front of him, like a sign from the Lord, hung Andrina's Sacrament dress. Those little pink roses—those little blue flowers on their background of grey, closely sprinkled with pin-prick black dots—anywhere on earth would the beadle have known them. He looked round. No one was in sight. He went up to the bush and touched the dress. Yes, he was sure of it. This was Andrina's dress—bought at the Jew-woman's store and made by Johanna. Where then was Andrina? In Cortes he had been assured by one who knew him that Herman du Toit was still in Losberg. Where then was Andrina?

Slowly he came back to the house, and asking the old coloured woman who answered his knock if he might have coffee, sat down on a seat by the door to wait for it. He must think of something to say to her. He must get somehow into talk with her and find out who lived in this house. Why had he not asked her at once when she answered the door? But what could he have asked her? Whose dress was that drying on a bush?

As he waited old Hans Rademeyer came round the house cracking a long bamboo whip to which he had just fixed a new lash. The whip-stick, he said, after giving the stranger "Good-day," was one of the best he had ever had, and came, as did

all the best whip-sticks, from the Platkops district.

At the mention of the Platkops district Aalst Vlokman looked up quickly and asked if Mijnheer knew it?

The old man answered that he did not, but that his whip had been given him by one who did—Mijnheer van der Merwe of the farm of Uitkijk in the Caroline district, whose people still lived in Platkops.

Aalst Vlokman moved uneasily on the seat, and, speaking with difficulty, asked:

"Is it long since you were at Uitkijk, Mijnheer?"

"But four weeks ago," answered the transport-driver. "Or it might be five. And many times before that."

Aalst Vlokman rose suddenly from the seat. "Mijnheer," he begged, "tell me this. Was there a young girl in the house at Uitkijk when you were there? One that was called Andrina du Toit?"

"And what if there was?" asked Oom Hans, pausing in his work with the whip.

"Look now," answered Aalst Vlokman humbly. "It is her that I seek. It was said that she had gone to the Losberg district, but when I went by the house just now I saw there, drying on a bush by the roadside, a dress that once she wore for the

Sacrament. Mijnheer, if Andrina is now in your house, tell me how it goes with her, for I, and not the man that she thinks, am her father."

"Is your name then Aalst Vlokman?"

The beadle, surprised, answered quickly: "It is that."

"Look then, my friend! It goes well with Andrina. Three weeks ago was her child born, and coming too soon it went at first hard with her. But now it goes well, and with the child also. It was she herself that asked this day for her dress to be washed and made ready to wear so soon as she can get up. That is how Mijnheer came to see it on the bush."

"How came she here?" asked the beadle.

Hans Rademeyer told him. And when he had told all that there was to tell the old man left the beadle on the seat and went into the house. As an inner door opened Aalst Vlokman heard Andrina say: "Is that you, Oom Hans? Come in then." The door closed and he heard no more.

Out in the spring sunshine, alone on the bench, the beadle grew suddenly fearful. His journey now was ended, and through it all he could trace the finger of God guiding him here to the toll-house. The Sacrament dress, the cause of so much bitterness in days that were past, was to him but the last of many small forgotten miracles giving him direction. Yet still he was fearful.

How would Andrina feel towards him? How could she feel anything towards him but hatred? What had he done to deserve her love as this old man, Hans Rademeyer, deserved it? He could think of nothing. No kindness had he shown her in all these years either by word or deed. Never in all these years had she called him "Oom" as she called Hans Rademeyer "Oom." By what name would she call him now? By what name would her child learn to greet him?

All, all, it seemed to the beadle, depended now upon this!

. . . In the little bedroom which she shared with Tan' Trintje Andrina lay listening quietly to Oom Hans. She was still weak, and in her weakness her thoughts wandered from Aalst Vlokman, of whom he was speaking, to Tan' Coba. It was Aalst Vlokman whom Tan' Coba had loved as she, Andrina, loved her dear Arry, and it was for him that she had carried those words in her heart that she could not speak. And now Tan' Coba was dead and Aalst Vlokman was here, sitting out on the bench in the sun. What was it that Oom Hans had said . . . ? This—that the beadle had come to beg that he might work for her and for her child, that he might care for her and for her child. . . . Arry's child. . . . And he had never liked the Englishman! Jantje had said it. Yes. Jantje had loved the Englishman

but the beadle had never liked him. How strange that was! How strange it was that Tan' Coba had loved the beadle and that the beadle had loved her mother! All life was strange when one looked at it one way, and all life was simple when one looked at it another way. But with Oom Hans it was never strange. Oom Hans was like Christ. If Christ had lived to be an old, old man He would have looked like Oom Hans—with such kindness in His eyes and such a smile upon His face. Yes, Oom Hans was like Christ just as Mevrouw at Harmonie was like God. . . . At Harmonie now, in the orchard there, the peach trees were surely in blossom—and she could see again Tan' Coba in the orchard looking for eggs for Mevrouw. That was the day of Jan Beyers's letter. "Andrintje, Andrintje," Tan' Coba had called. . . . And she would never call her so again. There was no Tan' Coba now. . . . Only Tan' Johanna, living alone in the little mud house. Tan' Johanna had sent her no message like Mevrouw. But some day, perhaps, one would come and then she would go again to Harmonie. . . . But not yet . . . not yet. . . . If she went there now she would cry when she came to the outside room where the Englishman had taught her and Jantje school. And she must not cry. . . . She must not cry. . . . Was not her dear Arry safe for ever in her heart? Was not her love this little

round bald head held close against her breast? And was not Christ this old, old man who sat by the side of her bed? . . . Yes, surely it was. . . . Christ grown old, grown old. . . . What was he saying now?

Old Hans Rademeyer's voice, so tender and compassionate, broke in through her thoughts at last. "Let him come to you now, my little one. Let him come! Look, dry you your eyes and I will call him."

She had dried her eyes and raised herself on her pillow when the beadle opened the door.

"Come in then, Ou-pa," she said. "Come in then and see the little grandson that you have, with his round bald head."

THE END

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